Stories of Life, Love and

Adventure

15cts

August
1916

YAHOYA

A Complete Novel of the Southwest

by Jackson Gregory

IN THE GRIP OF THE MINOTAUR

When Norsemen Invaded the Ancient Mediterranean

A New Serial by
Farnham Bishop and
Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

A Winning Line-up

S.B.H. Hurst
Henry Oyen
Saml. Alexander White
Hapsburg Liebe
W.C. Tuttle
J. Allan Dunn
Brevard Mays Connor
Frederick Wm. Wallace
Carroll K. Michener
Roy P. Churchill
M.F. Brooks
Frederick S. Macy

WE BOAST A BIT

ONE of the best-known educators in New York, who has read ADVENTURE since its first number, met us (editorial us) in a subway station last week, and said: "I read all the all-fiction magazines. That and fishing are my two recreations. ADVENTURE has always been good, but I have been looking for an opportunity to tell you that the last six numbers have been the best all-fiction magazines that I have ever read."

We admitted it.

"And haven't lots of people been finding it out?"

We cheerfully told him that our circulation was forty per cent. larger now than a year ago, and that it had been jumping ahead every month for the past six months. In fact, we had every reason to expect that it would double itself in a year.

"Then why don't you shout it in the magazine," said he, "so that all your old friends may rejoice with you?"

You will find in this conversation, which is accurately reported, the boast that we threatened to make on this page. We are delighted to be able to make it. As it refers to circulation figures, which are sometimes open to suspicion, we are hoping that you will receive it not as a boast but as a cheerful bit of office gossip passed along to you.

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ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Managing Editor

Contents for August, 1916

Cover Design . . . . **Francis Miller**

Yahoya *A Complete Novel* . . . . **Jackson Gregory** 3

A book-length story of unusual power telling of a determined man who strikes back into the heart of the Great American Desert. He seeks gold. He finds *Yahoya* and love. She is too remarkable a girl to miss knowing. And the strange desert race of Indians, with their quaint customs and beliefs, lift the story far above ordinary fiction.

Some Fishing . . . . **Frederick William Wallace** 56

When the crew of a Canadian fishing-boat hook a submarine, you can imagine there was something doing; especially since the stubborn old captain was bound to land his steel-bellied fish.

The One Sheep That Was Lost . . . . **Frederick S. Macy** 67

The struggle to make our Philippines a place fit to live in, and to liberate our brown brothers from banditry and ignorance, has been a trying one. Mr. Macy gives you a vivid story of Army Service life.

Psychology and Copper . . . . **W. C. Tuttle** 80

This master laughsmith hands you a yarn that's funnier than ever. Read it. It's a tonic.

The Hunt-Pack . . . . **Samuel Alexander White** 84

What happened to a man and woman to whom all doors on the Dawson Trail were barred, though Winter was on the North.

In the Grip of the Minotaur *A Four-Part Story. Part I.* . . . **Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur** 96

In the days when Ancient Crete ruled the seas, drawing tribute from Troy, from Greece, even from the great Pharaoh of Egypt, there grew up in the North a great power that threatened the Mediterranean world. This instalment tells of the first visit of Norsemen to Troy, and wild as the fiords of their homeland are the adventures they meet.

A Woman Keeps a Secret . . . . **Hapsburg Liebe** 126

She was a mountain woman, with a heart steadfast as her native Tennessee hills. By a man who lives there.

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from preceding page)

The Manhood of a Chinaman . . . . **M. F. Brooks** 133

Death Valley; a woman; a Chinaman with a soul, and a story that will stick in your brain for days.

The White Hope's Understudy . . . . **Brevard Mays Connor** 137

This prize-ring yarn has a punch in every page.

Gaston Olaf *A Three-Part Story. Conclusion* . . . . . . **Henry Oyen** 147

Gaston marshalls his forces for one last crushing attack on *Devil Dave Taggart* and the gang that rule the Big Woods. And *Rose Havens* chooses between *Gaston* and *Hale.*

The Receipt . . . . **S. B. H. Hurst** 187

Which proves that a man will stand by those of his blood, through anything. A tale of India, and the penal colony off Burma.

Hereditary Evidence . . . . **Roy P. Churchill** 196

Sailors bring home a strange tale to a grieving father, and the father repays.

The Woman of the Desert . . . . **Carroll K. Michener** 201

An American, fearless, a little foolhardy, pokes his nose into far Tibet, and in that out-corner of the world he learns a truth, old as the sand-swept mountains about him.

The Camp-Fire **A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers** 215

Headings . . . . **Chas. E. Searle**

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of *Adventure*, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1916. State of New York. County of New York. Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared James F. Birmingham, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the *Adventure*, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, The Ridgway Company, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. Editor, Erman J. Ridgway, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor, Arthur Sullivant Hoffman, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. Business Manager, James F. Birmingham, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owners are: (Give names and addresses of individual owners, or, if a corporation, give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of stock.) *Owner:* The Ridgway Company, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. *Stockholders:* The Federal Publishing Company, a corporation, 15 Exchange Place, Jersey City, N. J. The Butterick Company, a corporation, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. The Butterick Publishing Company, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York, N. Y. J. F. Birmingham, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. Wm. H. Black, 152 West 91st Street, New York City, N. Y. Mrs. Theresa R. Carroll, 777 Madison Avenue, New York City, N. Y. W. H. Gelshenen, 100 William Street, New York City, N. Y. Clara E. Kehoe, 2524 Creston Avenue, New York City, N. Y. H. F. Morse, 3 West 46th Street, New York City, N. Y. Laura J. O'Loughlin, 156 Ridge Street, Glens Falls, N. Y. Mrs. Arethusa Pond, 955 West End Avenue, New York City, N. Y. Erman J. Ridgway, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. Augustus Van Wyck, 149 Broadway, New York City, N. Y. R. A. Van Wyck, 149 Broadway, New York City, N. Y. G. W. Wilder, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. Marie A. Wilder, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. Ben F. Wilder, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) George W. Wilder, 329 West 108th St., New York, N. Y. Gertrude C. Wilder, 329 West 108th St., New York, N. Y. Julia Marlowe, Hotel Walton, Philadelphia, Pa. Erman J. Ridgway, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. John Adams Thayer, Westport, Conn. John O'Hara Cosgrave, 128 West 59th St., New York, N. Y. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. J. F. Birmingham, Business Manager. *Sworn to and subscribed before me this 8th day of May*, 1916. A. P. Schoen, Notary Public. (*My commission expires March* 30th, 1917.) [Seal.]

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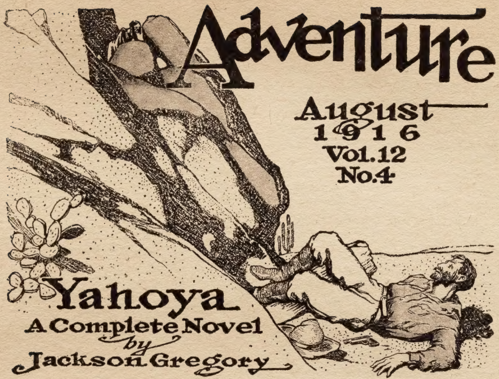

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Yahoya

A Complete Novel

by

Jackson Gregory

Author of "The Red Law," "Beyond the Law," etc.

BREATHLESS waiting — for what? Blind terror — of what thing? The waiting interminably prolonged because the man did not know what was the thing he must expect; terror more hideous than mere fear because it was the unknown which menaced.

In all of the universe there was now only this one thing which mattered; all else was forgotten. And what was it? To the man the desert in which he lay, helpless and hopeless, had ceased to exist. He no longer saw the hot sky, the molten sun, the limitless stretch of sand, cactus and blistering rock. He saw only the eyes which watched him.

They seemed staring at him terribly, two eyes which were steady, unwinking, immeasurable, inscrutable twin pools of ink. At one instant they became to his fevered fancy the fierce eyes of a savage, desert born and bred, observing his death with a curiosity at once unmoved and strangely childlike. Then he thought that he saw the eyes expand, dilate, grow enormous, the eyes of some misshapen monster thing, into whose lair he was the first man since the first dawn to penetrate. Northrup's reeling brain groped insanely for the visualization of the great body to which the eyes must belong, and which he could not see.

Then, with unconsciousness seeking to cast its black mantle over the man who struggled against it, the eyes seemed suddenly to change again, to grow smaller, smaller, rounder, until they were the evil eyes of the desert's chief curse, *Sika-tcua*, the yellow rattlesnake. He found himself groping, wondering dully if there were truth in the old tale, if a snake might charm a man and draw him closer and ever closer to the quick forked-tongue? He set his two hands out in front of his pain-twisted body, sinking them in the blistering sand, seeking to stop the impulse which had crept upon him.

He knew that the gray wolf at times came down from the ridges; that the panther followed the track of the mule-deer here; that the gaunt, mean-spirited coyote was not averse to sitting patiently and watching the slow death of one of his superior animals, waiting. His tortured thoughts of a

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coyote were no less terrible than the others now.

All day long the steep rays of the desert sun had smitten at him pitilessly; all day the red-black lava rocks among which he lay had burnt his body; all day the flying sand carried upon the hot blast of wind had seared and scorched his bloodshot eyeballs. It had been in the first, white dawn that he had fallen. Encompassed through the hesitant hours by the material threats of the desert, he had not once groaned. It was Northrup's way to suffer in silence.

But now the unknown had swept the last vestiges of reality aside; it had the seeming of creeping close about him from all quarters of a veritable mundane hell. Half-crazed with pain in the semi-consciousness which he was always fighting for, it was as if he had passed out of the old life already and into a fierce land of sorcery. Of only one thing could he be certain now—the pair of steady black eyes watching him through a fissure in the rocks above.

Had it been an hour since he had called out? Or had many circling eons reeled drunkenly over him since his voice, disturbing the vast silence, had choked back into his throat? He did not know.

He knew that he had called out, thinking that these were the eyes of a man, a human being like himself, that he had begged for help. He knew that there had come no answer, that the eyes had watched him with the same steady curiosity. He knew that he had shouted and that long ago he had grown still.

Once he had painfully dragged from its holster the automatic which had not been shaken loose in his fall; when, with a blind anger upon him, he had lifted it a little the two eyes were gone. When it had fallen from his weak grasp the two eyes were back there, watching him with the same cursed steadiness.

In a moment of half delirium the quick suspicion had come to him that it was Strang, Strang who had deserted him in his helplessness, robbing him of the scant supply of water to drive on madly, seeking to gain the next water-hole. But no; Strang wouldn't be tarrying here, watching him die. Strang wouldn't even be so much as thinking of him. Strang was taking his own chance, his one chance, and pushing on desperately.

Northrup had lived through the day praying dumbly for the coming coolness of the night. Now the night was coming and he was afraid of it.

He twisted his head a little to look at the sun. He was less sure that the sun was setting than that this was the last time he would ever look upon it. In the west, a riot of color; the sun was sinking through a mist which seemed to rise from a sea of blood. Night was at hand. And with the sign of its coming the sense was strong upon him of the unknown, terror-infested, creeping closer about him.

"Strang might have waited," he thought.

His swollen lips and dry, aching throat were long ago past utterance. But he was not past saying within himself:

"I won't die until I know to what —— thing those eyes belong!" There was much stubbornness in Sax Northrup.

IT WAS not meant that he should die yet. And so he did not die. It was meant that he should see Strang again, that he should stumble upon a century-long hidden secret of the desert. So he lived on where another man would have died.

The silver desert moon was two hours high in the purple sky when he realized that he had lost consciousness and found it again. Before he thought of that he thought of the eyes which had so long watched him; before he saw the moon he saw them. They were over him now, just over him, less than a yard away.

He stared upward through the night light curiously. There was sufficient light for him to see clearly, but his brain cleared slowly.

In seeking to guess the riddle of the two eyes, to conjure up the thing to which they belonged, he had never thought of a woman. And yet a woman it was bending over him, though his mind took long in clearing enough for him to be sure of that.

She was old, unthinkably old, unbelievably ugly. She might have been the barren deity of a barren land. She might have been a skeleton, with the skin upon the fleshless skull tanned by sun and wind through hundreds of years until it was leather. Squatting motionless over him she did not seem to be a living, breathing being until he saw the eyes, the same steady, unwinking black pools of ink with the glint of the moon in them.

The moment was uncanny. The moonlight dragged weird figures from the desert floor, charging them with ghostly unreality. The thing squatting above him might have been a sister thing to the fantastic shapes the moon made everywhere about her.

Northrup shivered. His reason, making its way back through the darkness of his stupor, had not fully reinstated itself. He knew that here in this strange land of aridity there could be no such thing as decomposition. When death came it struck its blow cleanly, unattended by decay. Air, sun, wind, when they had their way undisputed, made of the dead such a thing as that which bent over him. If no prowling beast came to rend apart, then the body would last throughout generations, perhaps centuries.

Fear comes in many guises but never with so cold a clutch as when whispering of the supernatural. At the shock from the pictures whipped up before him by his own imaginings, Northrup again lost consciousness.

Later—he did not know how much later—it seemed quite natural for him to feel that some one was moving about him. He realized dimly that it couldn't be Strang, for Strang had gone on. He knew that it must be the thousand-year-old woman who had come out of the nowhere, riding on a moon-ray, perhaps; who, when she was done pottering around him, would go back the way she had come. He didn't try to turn his head to watch her because he knew that he hadn't the strength left in him.

She had slipped something soft under his shoulders, had even managed to turn his great body a little, making it lie a fraction less painfully. And she had brought him water. That was a joke on Strang! He had gone on furiously, lugging three or four warm cupfuls in his canteen, thinking that there was no other drop to be had until one had crossed many miles of desert.

There came intervals during which Northrup was oblivious to everything about him, brief spaces of time when he awoke to both realization and curiosity. But for the most part he existed in a condition which was a sort of dim border-line between consciousness and stupor. He accepted the present as matter of fact, forgot the past and did not seek to speculate upon the future.

For days he lay upon the talus, upon the first of whose ragged boulders he had fallen from the cliffs of porphyry above. The old woman, moving with the feebleness and the slowness of a Winter sunbeam, forced her shaking hands to construct a shelter over the spot where he lay.

A ragged, home-made cotton blanket stretched above him from rock to rock, a robe of rabbit-skins made at once cover and bed. She brought him water in a rude *olla* of sun-baked clay, administered gruelly messes made from corn-meal, attending him after the first with a faithfulness like a shepherd dog's. Where she went for the water, what was the source of her food supply, he did not know.

The silence was seldom broken. For hours at a time she would squat near him, her blanket drawn about her shoulders, over her head, her hands lost in its folds, her ancient face turned upon him in an expressionless stare. When there arose absolute need for speech there was no difficulty in understanding each other.

Northrup, through many years of going up and down among people of her breed, had come to understand the tongue of the Indians of Walpi, Oraibe, Taos. When he had called her "*So Wuhti*," which is the Hopi for Old Woman or Grandmother, she had understood. She had named him "*Bahana*," White Man, and the ceremony of introduction was complete.

For a long time Northrup, lying grim and quiet, thought that by struggling to keep on living he was but postponing the hour of his death a few hours. Among his lesser injuries he thought that he could count the fracture of his left arm. He could only speculate upon the extent of injury done internally.

Had he been in a hospital with capable physician and nurses attending him there might be a chance. But here, with the half-cooked food a wild woman brought, with the nauseating decoctions which she extracted from he knew not what plants or roots, with a bed of lava rock, his chance seemed little enough. He watched her making his medicines, heating the sticky liquid over a greasewood fire, then setting it aside that she might sing over it and so make it "good medicine," and imagined that the mixture would be about as efficacious as her singing. The latter was horrible enough. But he got well.

And they grew to be companions of a

sort, as perhaps nearly any two of God's creatures would if set alone in the world. The fact that the old hag was living here and absolutely alone, that she seemed contented to be here and looked for no other company than her own until Northrup had come, aroused curiosity after a little.

He soon found many questions to ask. And during the five months which passed before he was a strong man again—and one must be certain of his full strength before he seeks to walk out into the desert with the little water he can carry and the knowledge that he must travel forty miles to the first water-hole—he learned much from So Wuhti.

II

I HAD not So Wuhti led him at last to her abode, Northrup would never have found it. It was slow climbing for them both, the woman weighted down by close to a century of years, the man still so weak that a little exertion set him trembling throughout his wasted body.

The chosen chamber of So Wuhti was close up to the cliff-tops, a roughly gouged-out room in the rocks, to be approached only by a steep trail from below. It was constructed cunningly in a great fissure so that while from it the old woman might look out over the desert, it would be a keen eye down there to discover her.

Upon the floor lay So Wuhti's bed, a tumbled pile of cotton blankets of native weave and a rabbit-skin robe. In a smoke-blackened corner were a few charred sticks and bits of brush; here and there were sun-baked clay utensils, for the most part black and cracked. A few strings of dried meat, a heap of shelled corn, a pot of water, a prayer-stick against the wall by the bed completed the equipment of the room.

From So Wuhti's boudoir—Northrup always called it that and So Wuhti seemed greatly pleased with the name—it was no trick to come to the top of the cliffs by means of the short ladder. And here one came upon that wonder of the desert of which a thousand tongues have told since first the old Spanish conquistadores dipped into it, which countless artists have sought to catch upon their brushes.

For a hundred miles in all directions the eye passed over gray floor, sweeping up into loma and mesa, the magic desert colorings over it all, deep blues and glittering bronzes, the snow white of drifted sands, the gray-green of cactus and brush, the brick reds of rocky precipices. Through the clear, dry air the eye sped instantly over waterless distances where a man might find slow death in crossing.

Here, just at the cliff's edge, Northrup found again the half-expected, the tumbled ruins of an ancient watch-tower. His mind toyed with the pictures which his fancies suggested.

The vision arose of a gaunt, cat-quick sentinel, hawk-eyed, skin beaten into glistening copper from the sun, keeping guard here while his brothers slept in a younger century; starting up as, many miles away across the rolling floor of desert sand and scrubby growth he caught a quick glimpse of an invading enemy; cupping his hands to his mouth to send outward and downward his warning shout; kindling the ever-ready pile of greasewood fagots to send out over the land other messages of warning, voiceless, lightning-winged. And, as if the old time were not yet dead though the watch-tower of stone was crumbling, he saw a pile of dry greasewood and a black smudge of smoke against the side of the one upstanding slab of stone.

He went back, down to So Wuhti, wondering.

As, little by little, strength came back into his emaciated body, he grew impatient for the time when he might dare to take up the trail again. But a month passed and he knew that it would be as mad a thing to try to move on as to climb to the cliff-tops and leap downward.

There was water here; So Wuhti brought it laboriously from a hidden spring far back and deep down in the great fissure in the rock wall. If he turned back, he knew there was no more water within thirty miles; if he went on it was a gamble if he would find water at the end of forty miles. So he waited for his strength to come back to him.

Slowly, so slowly that perhaps she was never aware of it, So Wuhti's silence slipped from her. She came, in her loneliness, to feel a strange affection for the big-bodied Bahana with his white skin, his yellow hair and blue eyes.

She had never seen a man like him. At first she seemed a little in awe of him, a little afraid of him. In those first weeks she would sit and watch him suspiciously, her lips locked, her eyes bright with speculation.

But, as the Hopi legends have it, woman is the daughter of Yahpa, the Mockingbird, and so, since her father is so great a talker, may not long remain silent. The legends of her forefathers were scripture to So Wuhti.

So it turned out that as they sat together in the old woman's boudoir or upon the cliff-tops, the slow hours passed to the throaty monotone of So Wuhti's talk while Northrup smoked her tobacco in his pipe and listened. It took him no great time to recognize the fact that the old woman was half crazed—a brooding, solitary life and a mind filled with superstitions having worked their way with her.

In the main her conversation was an ingenious fabric of lies told with rare semblance of truth. As if she were recounting some minor happening of the day, she told of a visit she had had from Haruing Wuhti, chief deity of the Hopi polytheism. The goddess, coming up out of the sea, had come across the desert, running swifter than an antelope. So beautiful was she that she had hurt So Wuhti's eyes with her beauty. *Aliksai!* Listen, Bahana! She is like a soft white maiden, Haruing Wuhti, her hair yellow like the squash blossom, yellower than yours. Her eyes are like turquoises, her mouth as red as a sunset through the sandstorm. She came swiftly at So Wuhti's call. Through the night the goddess sat there, So Wuhti here, and they talked.

So Wuhti shook her head, mumbled, grew silent. The Bahana was not to hear the things of which Haruing Wuhti and So Wuhti spoke in the night.

She explained her presence alone here. She told him of it twice, once in answer to his question, once volunteering the information. Had she gone into the matter a third time Northrup had no doubt that he would then have had three instead of merely two distinct explanations to choose from.

In the first account Northrup found many traces of ancient Indian religions. So Wuhti spoke familiarly of the beginnings of the world which, while she admitted that it was Haruing Wuhti and the Sun who had done the actual work, she herself witnessed.

She called Northrup's attention to the fact that the spot in which he and she were was the top of the world. Hence it became clear that it was very distantly remote from the abiding-place of the chief goddess. Being so far away the goddess must have some one in whom she could trust to see that everything went right. Consequently So Wuhti, a very great favorite with Haruing Wuhti, was stationed here. When there was need she built signal fires at the ruined watch-tower and Haruing saw and understood the matter.

If Northrup didn't take a great deal of stock in this explanation, he had the other one: Further in the desert, so far and across such a waterless tract that the white man could only send his hungry eyes traveling into it, was a land where there were hidden cities. The gods of the underworld had built these cities. Then they had given them to a people, the people of So Wuhti.

There were seven of these cities, the Seven Cities of Chebo. (Northrup smiled as he saw a trace of the old legend told by the early Spanish explorers of the Seven Cities of Cibola.) They were very rich cities, having much silver, many turquoises and of late years much gold, which they made into rings and bracelets, the chiefs having cups and plates of gold.

In order that they might remain hidden from the greed of the white men and from the jealousy of other tribes, they set sentinels out through the desert, a hundred miles away. Such a sentinel was So Wuhti. She had but to set fire to the fagots upon the cliffs and the chiefs of the Hidden Cities of Chebo would understand.

Northrup must understand that the gods and goddesses were very close to the people of So Wuhti. Didn't Haruing Wuhti herself come here to chat with So Wuhti, to eat *piki* with her? It was so.

And by living here alone So Wuhti was doing a kindness at once to her people of Chebo and to her sovereign deity. The priest had told her. As long as she lived she would watch here. When she was to die she would build a big fire which would carry the word across the desert so that another might be sent to take her place. And then Haruing Wuhti would come for her and throw her cloak about her and So Wuhti would be a young *mana* again, living always where the Big River breaks through the crust and goes into the underworld where the gods live.

Though the old woman's rambling stories with their innumerable digressions and repetitions soon ceased to interest him, Northrup did not fill his canteen and move on when at last he felt that he was his old, strong self. Half-crazed old savage that she was, So Wuhti was none the less human. Nor was there any denying his obligation to her. Had it not been for her he would be now only what the coyotes and strong-beaked birds would have left of him. And now, strong enough to attempt the passage of the desert, he could not fail to see that So Wuhti was coming quickly to the end of her life, and he could not bear the thought of going on heartlessly, leaving her to die alone.

SHE looked at him curiously many times during those last few days together. She, too, had seen her death coming to her at last and looked at it with steady, curious eyes. She was not afraid, she did not seem sorry to go. She was certain that Haruing Wuhti was making her future existences her own concern. It was all arranged.

She had never manifested a hint of emotion of any kind since he had seen her beady eyes peering at him through the crack in the rocks and now he had been here upward of six months. He did not expect for a sign of emotion now. Too long had she had the opportunity of looking forward to the end to be greatly perturbed by it now that it was at hand.

It came with a little shock to him one day that So Wuhti was all human, after all. Out of a still silence by the ruined tower she had moved to him quickly, her crooked claw of a hand suddenly fastening about his forearm.

"You're a good man, Bahana," she said, her eyes unusually bright upon his. "Many days ago you were ready to go. You wait that So Wuhti does not die alone like the coyote. *Askwali!* I thank you. Haruing Wuhti will bring you many good things. I will tell her."

With all of her madness she was not without wisdom. She set her chamber in order that night; Northrup had the suspicion that in honor of the occasion she even went so far as to bathe. Then, when the first stars were coming out she made a trembling way to the cliff-tops, Northrup helping her up the short ladder.

In the faint light here Northrup saw how she had arranged her hair, and the thing came to him with something of a shock. She had done it up into two whorls, one at each ear, the imitation of the squash blossom which with the Zuñi people tells the time when a maiden has ripened into the first blush of womanhood. So Wuhti was ready for the coming of Haruing Wuhti, for the time when again she would be beautiful—a young *mana*.

When at last the great fire, which at her command he had kindled, had burnt down, Northrup went slowly back into the stone chamber which had so long been So Wuhti's and which was never again to know her presence. As he looked at her blankets laid in order, folded by hands into which the chill had already crept, when he saw the broken jugs and crocks set in their neat row, a sudden moisture came into his eyes. So Wuhti had been good to him and she was dead. So Wuhti was gone and he was lonely!

In the coolness of the night, having only the stars to guide him, his canteen freshly filled, he pushed on, out into the desert.

III

ONLY because of the great stubbornness which was a part of him, and because of the unswerving purpose which had grown to be a part of that stubbornness, did Sax Northrup battle on with the desert instead of turning back now. For fight was it to be at every step, with the ultimate outcome hidden upon the knees of the barren gods of the Southwestern Sahara.

Already was he in a land into which men do not come, where perhaps before him ten white men had not ventured since the time of Fray Marcos close to four hundred years ago. Here was a region from which a man might bring back with him nothing but a tale of suffering; where often enough he might find nothing but a horrible death. And yet Northrup, seeking that which he sought, with his eyes open went on.

But, thinking that he knew the desert, he came to learn that he had never known it. Alone in the silence he came to understand a little the majesty and power of God.

Day after day, night after night, he saw these things made tangible in the sweep of the sandy floor, in the stern grandeur of the uplifted walls of rock. Through the fragment of eternal silence through which he fought his way he felt these things. He felt himself a small figure alone in a strange, hard world.

Grandeur, majesty, sublimity—he knew them to be of the desert. But they were not the essence of it. Its supreme quality, seen at all times and not to be mistaken, was its savage fierceness. The desert is no hypocrite; its teeth are always bared, poisoned teeth in a snarl at the intruder, threatening no less its own offspring. It is the land of the iron fang.

As he battled on, always was he in the heart of another battle which had outworn the youth of time. A struggle to the death, without quarter, and oh, the silence of it! Here about him was no created thing which the desert did not strive to kill. Here was no living thing upon all the terrible surface which did not strive to kill its brother creation.

Life here had never gotten beyond its primary, elemental phase. It was, over and over, the frenzied seeking to inflict death in order that the conqueror might live; to live in order to kill; to deal death and to flee from death.

The fierce brood of things struggling for existence even from the very womb of their terrible mother were without exception a brood armored and armed, the desert coyote a murderer with a coward's heart and a madman's cunning; the wildcat a machine for assassination; the gray wolf so much cold steel, tireless, swift, merciless, the spirit of slaughter cast into flesh and blood; the rattlesnake as deadly as death itself; even the harsh growth of vegetation, bound to earth by its iron roots so that it might not spring to attack or flee from its enemy, was armed with its thousand knife-thorns to tear at flesh and bite at bone.

Everywhere Northrup sensed the silent, unending struggle, the preying of living things upon one another, the warring of the land which bore them against them all. And he came to know what it meant for a human being to enter this scene of natural warfare.

Like the man and wife in Molière's comedy, fighting like cat and dog but ready to turn united against the interloper into their domestic realm, so these desert things seemed to combine with horrible power against the stranger in their realm, the Bahana who had dared set foot upon the changing sands. The sun tortured him, thirst came to madden him, spiked cacti tore at his bleeding hands, wind parched, sand blinded him, the rattlesnake and the poisoned spiders threatened when he slept or woke.

As the still, hot days went on he came almost to believe himself in a veritable land of sorcery, of witchcraft, of black magic. It became to him the demesne of the unearthly, the home of illusion, a region bewitched and bewitching him who looked upon it, the one place in the world where the supernatural was a part of nature.

He saw the sun changed into a monster bloodstone, the moon into a disk of white silver, the sober skies into a riot of colors, burning reds, rich purples, greens and golds. His eyes told him of a stretch of level lands which were to be crossed in two hours and he struggled across them for two days; told him of mountains five miles away which his brain, wise from past experience, knew were seventy miles from him.

He walked toward misty veils of pale pink and deep rose; they melted away from him, withdrawing, showing him the barren places which had been softened only in the seeming. He saw things which did not exist, built out of nothingness as by the touch of a magician's wand, hovering in the air. What looked like a lake before him, cool waters stirring softly to a cool breeze, was nothingness, a bit of trickery of the air. To see trees, mountains where they were not, turned topsy-turvy, became a commonplace.

There was one day when, hoarding the little water in his canteen, hurrying on to the vague promise of a water-hole, he saw quick clouds gathering in the sky, black with the rain in them. Caught in a driving current high above, the clouds passed over him. Saturated, struck by a cooler current of air, they burst open like huge water-bags, spilling the rain. He saw it fall in a steep slant. It was raining up there in big drops. And yet no single drop of water came down to him. In the dry air through which it plunged hissing downward it disappeared, drunk up by the air itself as a drop of moisture is drunk up by a dry sand bank. Merely the natural thing here, yet looking like enchantment.

Northrup was a man essentially given to strong, vigorous action rather than to fanciful musings. And yet here, with aught of action denied him beyond the monotonous driving of one boot after the other into loose sand, or up lava-strewn slopes, or about and through clumps of desert vegetation, for weeks his mind was the home of strange imaginings.

He found himself wondering, at first lightly, but at times with a soberness which startled him when he recognized it, if there did exist supernatural forces of which man had no understanding. The thought came to him that such a force had drawn him, Sax Northrup, from the beaten thoroughfares of white men into this empty land. What had brought him here while the men whom he had known of his class and type were driving their motors over smooth roads, dining in comfortable cafés, sleeping upon soft beds and otherwise disporting themselves as befitted the city-bred? What indeed but the wild tale of a dying Indian down in Santa Fé?

The thing which takes men by the hair and drags them to the hidden corners of the four quarters of the world is generally the same thing in whatever garb it chooses to wear—the lure of gold. It had brought him, him and Strang, here.

Through many a day there stood between Northrup and death a scrap of paper and a hope that the paper did not lie. In the main it had told the truth thus far. If, later on, it lied to him, why, then he'd do what many another man has done on the desert, die for want of water.

He had the way, before leaving any water-hole upon which he had come, of taking the paper out of his pocket, studying it thoughtfully, looking up from it across the bleak stretches, out toward a steep-walled mesa or the clear-cut ridges of distant mountains. And always his frowning eyes came back from the old story of sand, lava-rock, gorge, precipice and gray-green desert growth to the bit of paper in his hand.

Already was it more precious to him than the gold which he hoped it might lead him to.

"For if through some mischance I should lose this," he admitted to himself often enough, "why, then, I'd be a dead man in forty-eight, maybe in twenty-four hours!"

A STRANGE map this, which Northrup carried rolled and thrust into an empty rifle-cartridge for safety. That he had made it himself did not in any way make it seem to him infallible.

The Indian, dying in Santa Fé, had told him the way to follow and Northrup had made the rough map from the Indian's words. And he had known, from the time that he made his first step upon the long trail, that, trusting himself upon it, having only that to guide him deep into the secret heart of the land of little water, was as foolhardy a thing as he had ever done in all the years of a foolhardy existence. But there had been the golden lure.

As he crouched by some lonely water-hole, trying to get his big body into a scant patch of shade, his eyes turned upon his crude map, Northrup's thoughts had grown into the way of flying back to the manner of this thing coming to him at all.

He had been in Santa Fé, chafing under a short enforced idleness, restive, eager for whatever might come next on the cards. There he had found Strang; or to be exact Strang had found him. Northrup hadn't particularly liked him from the beginning. But men of his class were few and hard to find hereabouts and Strang was not without a certain insinuating way and a perseverance almost as great as Northrup's own.

Besides, Strang in the beginning of the matter had been in trouble and Northrup in his wide-handed, generous way had befriended him. The ridding oneself of a person to whom one has done a kindness is not without its difficulties.

At any rate Northrup and Strang had been together watching a game of cards in an adobe saloon when the Indian had first come into their stories. The native, a tall, gaunt, sinewy fellow thrusting through a knot of men at the door had come almost at a run to where they were.

"Sax Northrup?" he had asked swiftly.

Even before Northrup could answer, there came a little whirring sound and a small arrow, tipped with a blue feather, evidently fired through the open window from without, drove deep into the Indian's side. His eyes, turned toward the square of darkness, were horrible. And Northrup, bending over him quickly, had seen no pain, just wicked, venemous hatred in them. The arrow was poisoned and the wounded man knew it.

In a little room just off the saloon the Indian told his story to Northrup and Strang. To the latter because he asked to stay, since the Indian made no objection, because Northrup had no reason for privacy in the matter.

That night the Indian died. But first he had told his story. Northrup, looking his incredulity, saw a keenness of eagerness in Strang's eyes. And in the end the Indian convinced them both.

"Look!" he had panted, speaking as swiftly as he might in the Hopi tongue. "There is more—like this!"

He had managed to squirm over on his bed, jerking weakly at something tied about his body under his shirt. It was Strang's eager hands which did the actual work. There was a little bag there, made rudely from a piece of buckskin. And in the bag were two gold nuggets and half a dozen turquoises.

"But why do you give this to me?" Northrup had demanded. "You came here looking for me. I don't know you."

"I know you," the Indian had answered. "Where hard things get done, I hear your name. Where dangerous things are, I hear your name. A man must be like you to go there. Now listen: get paper quick; make marks on it while I tell you."

And so Northrup had made his map.

"It is many miles, more than two hundred, before you come to the beginning of the trail," the Indian had said. "Red Rock Gully, you know? And Badger Gulch beyond, and Coyote Gap on the other side, they are known to you."

"Yes," Northrup had answered.

"Then, Bahana, listen. Listen with both ears!"

He made his description of the trail to travel swiftly, seeming to have each great or minor direction in mind, as if he had carefully arranged every detail already. From Coyote Gap Northrup was to go straight toward the rising sun where it lifted between the two peaks in the Spanish Mountains, the peaks known as *Los Dos Hermanos*. There, in the pass, was water. It was not over ten miles from Coyote Gap.

Then, before going further, the Indian had wriggled up, his back against the wall, and had seized pencil and paper from Northrup.

"Look," he had said, making a little mark. "This is where the north star is. You can always find the place of the *Kwinae Wuhtaka*—North Old Man—on the desert? Day and night, by the stars?"

Northrup nodded. Already he had begun to feel something of the earnestness which seemed to possess the Indian and which at the jump had gotten into Strang's blood. The Indian grunted his satisfaction.

"Now," the Hopi had said at the end, showing the same readiness which So Wuhti showed months later to meet the Skeleton Old Man half-way, "it is done. You will go, for there is gold at the end of it all, and where there is gold, if it is under hot rocks, a white man will go. The other Bahana," looking shrewdly into Strang's brightening eyes, "will go also. You will make two writings, so that if the wind steals one you will not die for water."

"Oh, I suppose we'll go," had been Northrup's answer. "But look here, my friend—I want to know what's back of this? Why are you so infernally set upon anybody using the stuff you can't use yourself?"

The Hopi's last earthly grin was full of malice.

"It is because I hate Tiyo," had been the full of his explanation.

IV

THE question, "Who the devil is Tiyo?" had come quite naturally to Northrup's lips when he had first heard the name. But now it had long ago been crowded aside, all but forgotten. In due time he'd know, or else he'd never know, and in the meantime he had other matters to ponder upon.

It had been at a spot some ten miles in a general northeasterly direction from the point indicated on his map by the words "Cañon—Pines—Mountain Ridge," that he had had his mishap. Here Strang had left him. Here So Wuhti had appeared before him like a black witch, to become his good angel.

When he had pushed on again he had found that, day after day, the country unfolding before him became more menacing. He found no water of any description, excepting at those spots where little crosses upon his map indicated it. He slept and woke with the knowledge that should he miss one of these holes, should the Indian have lied to him, should the drifting sands have covered and blotted out a spring, why then the tale was told for Sax Northrup.

And there was another thing, a thing which multiplied a hundredfold the danger which lay about him: While the figures upon his map told him definitely that it was ten or twenty-five miles between water-holes it was, after all, just guesswork—guesswork first on the part of an Indian runner, guesswork on his own part; guesswork where the penalty for a mistake might well be death. No, as he went on, there was not much call to puzzle over the question, "Who is Tiyo?"

"In a race across the desert with the 'Skeleton Old Man' it is well to travel light!" Northrup remembered that bit of advice. From So Wuhti's caves he had brought water, corn-meal, a little dried meat which she informed him was rabbit meat but concerning which he had his doubt. At any rate it was meat.

When he came to a pool in a dry creek-bed, a spring great enough to give life to a little splotch of green stuff under the cliffs, he rested, sometimes a day or two if there was a hard pull ahead of him. Here he found animal life, cotton-tails and jack-rabbits for the most part and a few birds. They were tame, having no doubt never set their bright round eyes upon a thing which walked upright as he did, and they were curious.

What he needed Northrup killed, either with his automatic or with stones. The meat had but to be tossed over the limb of sage or mesquite for the sun to "jerk" it for him.

But times came when his stomach was empty and he went long without food; when there were no last, precious drops in his canteen and he began to fear that at last his map was lying to him. But always he forged on; never did the thought of turning back come to him. He knew that Strang had gone ahead, Strang for whom he had felt a mild sort of contempt.

He passed successively the points he had marked "Cave Rocks," where he spent two days and a half in interested exploration of the broken remnants of a civilization which must have been many centuries old before the Spaniards came into the New World; Big Skeleton, where, as the Hopi had foretold, he came upon the sun-bleached bones of what must at one time been a veritable giant of a man, now a pile of bones no longer of interest to preying animals where it lay upon the top of an overhanging boulder; Poison Springs where there were more skeletons, these of thirst-tormented, unwary animals; the Sunken Meadows which might have been originally the home of all the world's butterflies, and where many remained, great-winged, incredibly swift, that they might live at all through the eternal warfare which the bird-folk here waged upon them, where humming-birds brightened the air and mocking-birds shook out their cool, clear notes against desert sun and silence; into the ancient realm of cliff-dwellers where he saw countless orifices punctured into the cliffs a hundred, five hundred feet above some spring where he camped.

As the weeks wore on and he entered more deeply into the heart of the unknown, Northrup became possessed of a faith in the undertaking which had not been with him at the outset. Then he had thought, "I'll go and see." Now he felt, "I'll go and find!"

The very fact that every day he had constant proof of the Hopi's truthfulness began to work its spell upon him. Why should the end of the tale then prove fiction? Was he hourly drawing nearer the desert treasure-house?

ACROSS bare, blistering miles he followed his trail that led him to those deathless springs which in old times had made these arid lands an open thoroughfare to moccasined feet. There were times in those long, silent days of utter solitude when, far to right or left, he fancied he saw along high cliffs the remains of an old civilization, man-made trails in the rock, rudely circular holes in the precipices which well may have led into cool, chambered dwellings.

But it was risking too much to seek to investigate here where distances are deceptive and water is not assured. Nor did he have the inclination to linger. His quest had gotten into his blood.

The time came at last when, standing clear and distinct in the north, he saw the line of cliffs marking his journey's end. He traveled now at night, since the moon was at the full. Through the loose sand which seemed one instant to give away as freely as water only to grasp at his ankles and hold him back the next, he plowed on all that night, his face set toward the north star. In the moonlight the desert about him was touched into a softness of beauty which was no attribute of it in the harsh light of day; the distant mountains looked unreal, mystically lovely, the borders of fairyland.

"What sort of people were the men and women who lived this, knew no life but this?" was Northrup's thought over and over. "The warriors, were they as hard as the desert by day? The maidens, were they as savage as their lovers? Or did the softness of desert moonlight, the tenderness of desert colorings seep into their souls?"

Toward dawn, from a gently sloping loma, he saw the clump of trees, mesquite for the most part, betokening the spot where he was to water and rest. From here, when the coolness of another dusk came, he would press on—over the last lap of the quest.

That day he dozed restlessly, dreaming broken dreams from which he started up repeatedly, muttering. The scenes through which he had so long traveled had had their deeper impressions upon him and suggested wild thoughts which in sleep were unchecked. The speculation of what might lay ahead mingled with them.

He felt all night as if he were in the grip of some power other than his own, not to be explained by materialistic mankind. He dreamed that the old peoples who had striven with the desert for existence, who had mastered it and lived through it, were not dead; that they still had their mountain fastnesses; that he moved among them; that strange adventures were his.

Toward late afternoon, too restlessly eager for further rest, he ate, drank, filled his canteens and struck out for the mountains. And before he had gone a mile, before the sun had wheeled down toward the end of the hottest day he had yet experienced, a thing occurred which sent a thrill through the man's physical being, a fresh shock of wonderment into his heart.

Before him were the heat waves trembling over a wide expanse of barren sand. Sand for miles in each direction, the white, loose sand which one finds in wind-tumbled dunes, like the white sand of the seashore, but waterless. Then slowly into the emptiness of burning air there grew a vision. He looked upon it at first with little interest; this sort of thing could hardly interest him after all these years of life upon the fringe of the desert, he thought. But, ten steps further he grew stock still, his heart thumping wildly, the old sense of the supernatural strong upon him.

He saw, woven into the semblance of reality from sunlight and air, hanging in the air close to the ground, like some master's painting suspended by invisible ropes, a scene of rare beauty, of mad beauty, for this bleak stretch of scant vegetation. It was a garden a hundred feet across, with tall, lush, water-loving flowers such as he had never seen before.

In the heart of the garden a pool of water with shade-trees dropping leaves into it, a pool not of nature's making but of man's. For surely its basin was white rock which man's hand had carved and scooped out; surely there stood carven pillars and columns of white stone about it. The water shone at him with a blue laughter, the white of the rock glistened like snow; the grass and plants flung emerald reflections at themselves; the blossoms everywhere were purple and scarlet and deep rose.

Clearer and clearer grew the desert vision until Northrup, seeing a bright-colored parrot drop from a swaying branch like a floating flower, caught his breath in wonderment.

"My God!" cried Northrup sharply. "Have I gone mad?"

He knew the way in which the thirst-torment ends: in forgetfulness of what one has suffered, in delicious delirium, in fancies like this thing which his two eyes told him was physical fabric.

His eyes had followed the gaudy flight of the parrot. And so they came to see what he had not seen before, to trick him into thinking he saw what he would not believe existed.

A hand had been thrown out—never mirage like this if this in sober truth were not magic's masterpiece—a slow-moving, graceful hand, a bare arm of rare perfection. The parrot had perched upon a finger, seeming to cock a suspicious, jealous head toward Northrup. So Northrup had seen the hand, the arm, the maiden herself.

She was lying upon her side, an arm flung out, an arm under her head. He saw the loose hair about her face, saw—or fancied he saw, for his senses were reeling—the face itself, the lips curving to languid laughter, saw the white robe girt about with a broad band of blue, saw the crimson flower set close to the brown throat, saw the little bare feet from which the white moccasins had fallen. And then——

Then the air had wavered and shimmered and clouded and cleared, and Sax Northrup found himself staring out across an empty stretch of white sand, drifted here and there by the desert winds.

V

TONIGHT the wind rose with sunset, sweeping across the desert in strong gusts. The white drifts of sand were disposed anew, in fresh designs. The sand, carried in level strata, cut at Northrup's face and hands, stinging him unmercifully like fine particles of heated glass.

Within an hour the wind dropped. The sparse grass here and there was motionless. It was stifling hot for another hour. Then came sudden cold through which Northrup made swifter progress. At dawn he thought that the mountains were not ten miles away, that he could come to them long before noon.

But as the sun rose, the wind came up with it, blowing again in mighty gusts, then settling into a steady storm from the north. Every step of the way now Northrup fought hard. The wind whipped the moisture out of his body until his skin seemed to be on fire.

Bend his head as he might, the sand found its way under his hat-brim, cutting his face, driving through his shirt-collar, slipping everywhere into his clothing, running into his boots. An hour after sun-up it was fearfully hot; the sun was a small ball looking very far away yet smoldering with an intense red heat.

He hoarded his water, but again and again his dry throat drove him to lift his canteen to his lips. He sought to see the mountains ahead of him and could not make out the dimmest outline.

The flying sand would have hidden them had they been less than a tenth of the ten miles distant. It had smothered the world; it was choking, stifling him. He tied a handkerchief about his face and threw himself to the ground. He could make no progress against that fierce, raging storm from the north. He knew the folly of matching his strength against it. At this rate he would have exhausted his force, drunk his water in an hour, and then the piling, drifting, flying sand would work its grim way with him.

He began to think the storm would never end. The darkness into which midday was plunged grew thicker; the sun was a terrible, unearthly thing, dim and red.

Until far in the afternoon the sand-storm swept upon him, racing away into the south with a sound of distant booming, with the whistle of dry sand upon dry wind. Little by little it subsided, the air thinned, a vague blur looking at the end of the world marked the mountains.

Northrup lifted his canteen. He had only a little water, perhaps two cupfuls, left. He drank sparingly and, fearful lest the wind might rise again, blowing for many days as he knew it did at times, he forced his heavy way northward.

He moved like a ghost through a mist of sand all that day. The wind came and went in gusts, dying down utterly toward sunset. The air cleared then, the mountains rose steeper, came marching to meet him. He drank the last drop of water and pushed on.

Moonrise found him, beaten and grimy, at the mouth of the great cañon toward which he had journeyed. He hurried on into the cañon. There were black shadows everywhere about him. But slowly as he went on the shadows drew into themselves as the moon climbed higher.

Here, on each side of him, were the walls of the cañon, lifted up in sheer cliffs. Already the cliffs were a hundred feet high; ahead he could see that they stood up into the sky seven hundred, a thousand feet. The cañon where he stood was perhaps fifty yards in width; a little further on it widened out to three times fifty yards, narrowing again rapidly.

But now Northrup's eyes were concerned not with the walls of rock but with the floor of the cañon. He wanted water, wanted it badly. All day he had been stinted for it; now he must have it, and soon. His throat ached and burned; his tongue felt thick and stiff in his mouth; his whole body cried to him for water.

He believed that he had come to the right cañon; it was as the Hopi had described it, lying due north of the last water-hole, with the tallest peak towering above it. If in the sand-storm he had lost his bearings, why then so much the worse for a foolhardy adventurer.

FOR an hour he sought water and found none. His thirst was tormenting him, driving him mad. The moonlight glistening from a white slab of granite tricked him; he hurried stumbling to it only to twist his lips into a silent curse when he saw clearly.

He sucked at his canteen and in sudden wrath threw it from him. A moment of terror came upon him in which he ran here and there blindly. He jerked himself together with anger at himself.

He went to the flat-topped boulder and sat down. He needed rest almost as badly as he needed water. And he must get himself in hand.

The orb of the moon silvered the cliffs above him. Northrup sent his eyes questing everywhere, even up the cliffs. He saw something move, a wolf he supposed. He wasn't interested in wolves; it was water he wanted.

But his eyes remained a moment with the sign of life, hundreds of feet above him. The moving thing came out from a blotch of shadow and stood upon the edge of the cliff. It was not a wolf, it was a man, or else the trickery of the moon was building another taunting vision for him.

The moving form, coming to the very edge, stood still. Northrup saw the man distinctly, almost straight up above him. The face was in profile, etched clear against the sky. It was the face of an Indian, Hopi perhaps, but handsomer than the Hopi Northrup had known, the nose prominent, the features sharply cut and clear. The Indian was naked save for the white loincloth and the band about his head. His arms were flung out toward the moon as if in supplication, his body rigid a moment, his head lifted.

Northrup sought to call out, and a dry whisper in his tortured throat fell hissingly upon his own ears. He sprang up, striving again to call. But the form above him was gone. The man had drawn back from the cliff-edge; the moonlight silvered the rock where he had been.

Hastily Northrup sought the way up there, knowing that he must come upon this man before he was beyond call. He might have used his gun to attract attention—he thought of that now—but already his feet had found the first of the rude steps in the cliff and he was climbing rapidly. When he came to the top, then if the man were not to be seen he would use the gun.

As Northrup's head rose slowly above the edge of the cliff he stopped suddenly, a little gasp in his throat. Here was a great shelf against the precipice, the cliffs falling abruptly to the desert below, rising sheer another five hundred feet back of the level space. The space, itself some hundred feet in length and half of that in width, appeared to him like some mighty stage set for one of the desert's wild extravaganzas.

He saw not one man but fifty, a hundred; he could not estimate how many. All were like the first, gaunt-bodied, clothed in the loin-cloth of pure white, their bodies glistening in the moonlight like polished bronze. They were moving about in a slow, stately procession, their arms lifted to the moon, their faces upturned, their forms swaying rhythmically as they circled about a form standing above them upon a flat boulder. Along the cliff wall upon the far side of the level space Northrup saw other forms, these in the shadow, clothed in white robes, whether of native cotton or buckskin he could not tell, the forms of matrons and maidens, scores of them.

Not a sound had come to him. The feet moving in the wide circle were bare feet falling lightly upon a floor of rock. He saw lips opened, moving in unison as if some mighty chant were bursting from them. And yet no sound of singing came to him. It was as still here as it was out ten miles across the sands.

The form standing upon the boulder about which the others circled, was that of an old man. Northrup saw the hooked beak of a nose like a hawk's, the hair falling about the shoulders, silver under the moon, the black eyes filled with a strange ecstasy. And then the black eyes saw him.

Just Northrup's head coming up slowly from the void below, a great head of yellow, disheveled hair, a great yellow beard, unkempt and made over into gold by the night light, great blue eyes looking fierce as a wolf's from the thirst upon him.

And yet the ceremonial dance, if such it were, went on with no pause. The old man stood still, his arms outflung, his lips moving as the lips of the others moved. He had seen Northrup, he had seemed then to have forgotten him.

Northrup came slowly up to the ledge, his big body seeming unnaturally large when at last he stood upon a level with the others.

"Water!" he cried hoarsely. "I want water."

He had spoken in English. His voice cut rudely into the silence. Those who had not seen him before saw him now. A hundred looks turned upon him, swift and startled. For a moment the swaying bodies and moving lips grew as still as the rocks. Then again the bodies swayed, the lips moved, the silent circle continued as if he had not broken into it.

"Water!" cried Northrup again, moving toward them heavily like some great tawny-maned lion, wrath in his eyes. And in half a dozen tongues, dialects of the southwest he hurled the word at them:

"Water. I want water!"

A fierce anger surged into Northrup's heart. Would these copper-bodied devils of silence keep on with their mad dance while Sax Northrup was dying of thirst?

He bore down upon them, the voice in his throat harsh and savage. They gave back before him, moving but a little to the side, their bodies still swaying, their lips still moving. But he saw that the scores of eyes were turned upon him wonderingly.

So he came almost to the boulder upon which the old man stood. He saw that this one was clad differently from the others, a long robe hanging from his shoulders, girted about by a broad band of red, a chain of glass beads—or were they turquoises?—about the forehead, holding the hair back. He had come almost to this man, thinking him to be the one in authority here, when he found another of the bronze bodies in his path.

Northrup plunged toward him, but this man did not move aside. He was taller than the others, Northrup noted, gaunt-bodied like them, but with mighty sinews standing out upon shoulders and arms and thighs, a man as tall as Northrup.

Northrup threw out his arm to thrust this man aside, his one thought to come to the old man. But his arm struck a body hard like rock, unyielding.

"—— you!" shouted Northrup. "Stand aside. I want water!"

The man's body was swaying gently with the other swaying bodies, his lips moving with the other moving lips, his eyes fearless and stubborn and filled with threat. Northrup's two hands shot out, gripping the bare shoulders.

Until now he had seen no sign of a weapon among these people. But suddenly a knife had leaped out in this man's right hand, the moonlight running down the thin, keen blade. And still no sound save Northrup's heavy breathing and scuffling feet and angry, snarling voice.

Northrup's rage was like the rage of a mad desert animal. As the knife-blade swept upward, preparatory for the downward blow, Northrup struck. His big fist hammered straight into the Indian's face, the knife clattered to the rocks, the Indian staggering back.

In an instant Northrup was upon him, had caught the lean body in his hungering hands, had dragged it to the cliff's edge, had lifted it high in air until the bronzed limbs stood out against the sky.

Then, his savage blood-lust gone as swiftly as it had come, he had cast the man down upon the ledge at his feet, turning swiftly toward the other forms which had ceased swaying at last. And as he turned he heard a burst of laughter, the soft, tinkling laughter of a woman. Out of silence he had drawn this thing, a woman's laugh bubbling over with mirth like the overflow of a sparkling fountain. And then he saw her.

Beyond the stone where the old man stood was a narrow rift in the wall of rock. Deep in the rift was a blazing fire, throwing into relief the form which had come out from it. The form of a girl, her left arm and shoulder bare and brown, a single stone or bead gleaming upon her forehead, her slender form clad in a long, loose robe of white, her feet encased in moccasins of white buckskin.

And her eyes under her dusky hair laughed, her red lips laughed. And as if an echo of her laughter came the laughter of the gaudy-plumaged parrot perched upon her round wrist.

Northrup stared at her in amazement, thinking himself staring at some soft maiden of the Orient. He forgot the others, forgot the man at his feet who had rolled over, his dark hand going swiftly to the knife upon the rock. He thought of it in time because of what he saw in the girl's eyes.

No sound after the laughter had died away, no single word. But in her eyes was a language which was not to be misunderstood. There was anger there now, a wrath which blazed as brightly as Northrup's had. And there was a command. Her eyes, passing beyond Northrup, were upon the man with the knife.

She lifted her hand as if putting a cup of water to her lips. Then she nodded briefly at the man who stood so close to Northrup with the knife shaking in his hand. Northrup, turning, saw again the picture of anger there, but an anger sullen and hesitant.

He again looked to the girl. Her hand, pointing at this man, made again the swift gesture of lifted cup, then swept in a wide arc, pointing into the rift in the rock walls through which the fire gleamed.

Northrup found himself watching as he might have done were this in reality some extravaganza and he in his seat in the audience. He read the command in the girl's furious eyes, the hesitation and sullen rage in the man's, the wonder in other eyes, and something that looked like fear, a look of baffled fury in the eyes of the old man in the long robe. And then he was following the man with the knife, passing through a long lane of silent, watchful figures, going after his guide through the narrow passageway into the cliffs.

For an instant, as he was passing close to where the girl stood at the mouth of the cleft, Northrup paused, his eyes turned curiously upon her. Her eyes met his steadily, eyes whose color was elusive there in the moonlight. He could only tell that they were big, dark and lustrous.

A word of thanks upon his lips was checked by what he read in her quick expression. The girl's gaze had swept him from the top of his tousled yellow hair to the sole of his dusty boots. Her look, meeting his again, was filled with admiration; her thought stood out plainly, with no attempt at concealment. It was as if she had opened her red mouth and said softly, wonderingly:

"You are the biggest man, the most wonderful, the most handsome I have ever looked upon!"

Northrup's face reddened suddenly and he went on, merely bowing deeply as he passed. He saw the face of the man with the knife; this man too had read the girl's expression and his features were twisted with malicious rage.

VI

NORTHRUP, forcing himself to drink slowly, looked about him between sips of the cold water. He had followed his guide through the narrow cleft, by the fagot fire, up a series of winding, uneven steps in the rock and out upon a second ledge, some distance to the side of the first and some fifty feet higher.

Here, in a niche in the rock, was a clay water-jug, brimming. Above rose the cliffs precipitately upon one side; upon the other they fell straight down to the more gentle slope of the foothills. There was no sign of habitation here, nothing to bespeak human occupation of these heights save the water-jug and the Indian who had brought him here.

Turning, Northrup looked back down the rude stairs and through the cut in the rocks. Upon the lower ledge the old man was standing upon the boulder, his arms lifted, his face upturned, his lips moving. About him the bronze figures, naked save for the loin-cloths, were passing noiselessly, bodies swaying rhythmically.

The girl with the parrot upon her wrist, a slender, peeled willow-rod tipped with feathers in her hand, was watching them. Her lips moved with the others, her lithe body swayed with theirs, the feather-tipped rod in her hand beat time to the voiceless singing.

The man at Northrup's side had slipped silently away, his bare feet falling noiselessly upon the rock staircase. Swiftly he went down, dropping from sight, reappearing by the fire, passing out upon the lower ledge to take once more his place in the circling about the old man.

Was the desert in all truth a place bewitched? And were these voiceless beings the band of sorcerers brewing black magic to cast out through the moonlight and over the world? What strange race of tongueless people was this upon which he had stumbled, following the wild tale of a dying Indian down in Santa Fé? And—suddenly the question which had not presented itself for many days came back to him now—who was Tiyo?

Northrup shrugged his shoulders in answer to his own questioning and again lifted the water-jug to his lips, drinking more deeply now. Time would answer him and in the meantime he was not going to die of hunger and thirst. He sat down upon the verge of the higher ledge, filled his pipe and, resting, watched what went on below.

For the greater part of an hour the silent circling continued. Then, at no signal which he could see, it ceased suddenly, breaking off with abrupt finality.

The girl with the parrot, walking slowly between the two long lines of bronze figures which had drawn up and grown motionless for her passing, went to the boulder where the old man in the white robe stood. As he reached down she put her hand up, taking one of his. She carried it to her lips, the action filled with reverence. The old man stood above her like one great in power, undisputed in authority, accepting homage and reverence as his due; the girl's attitude was one of rare humbleness and humility.

But in an instant the parts had changed. As she had dropped the withered hand, the old man had slipped down from his place of eminence. In a moment he had sunk to his knees, had lifted the blue embroidered fringe of her robe, had carried it to his lips. And the girl's air had suddenly undergone a change lightning swift. Her head was lifted, the round throat showing brown and bare through the opening in her robe; she had gathered her small height so that she looked tall; her manner was subtly arrogant, queenly proud. As the kneeling figure looked up at her the reverence was in his eyes, the power and dignity in hers.

"It's the land of mad folks!" grunted Northrup.

A man knowing as much as Northrup of the Indians of the Southwest, such as dwell in Oraibi, Walpi, ancient Taos, throughout the desert lands of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, knows with what tenacity they cling to traditions which were old centuries before the armored Spaniard came into the New World. He knew them for a deeply religious people, their beliefs stoutly maintained in the face of alien interference, filled with ceremony and symbolism. He knew that this thing which he was watching was some rite deeply important to these people, and could only watch, wondering vaguely what it portended.

Among savage people there is perhaps even less difficulty in selecting at a glance the "higher-ups" than among a people who have gone further with civilization. Already Northrup recognized the very obvious fact that the persons to be reckoned with here were the old man in the white robe, a priest, without doubt, the young man with the knife, and the girl. And now, awakening a keener interest in him, came the knowledge that, for the moment at least, it was the girl to whom all eyes were turned with reverence and obedience.

She lifted the rod in her hand, a *baho*, or prayer-stick, no doubt, and once more the silent circle was described, the old man leading, the young fellow with the wonderful physique following, the others taking their places behind him. And all of them, passing under the outstretched *baho*, stooped swiftly to lift the hem of her garment to their lips. She looked over their bent heads with bright eyes, like a young queen just come into her birthright.

In a little they had all passed by her and in silent procession had come through the defile in the rocks, mounting the crooked steps, passing by Northrup with sharp, black eyes turned upon him, across the second ledge and down at the far side, seeming to him to drop one by one into the void below.

After them came the women, matrons first, with their hair arranged in Hopi fashion, done low at each side, the maidens with their hair massed into two great whorls, one at each ear, flashing quick glances of curiosity at him. Upon the lower ledge now were five figures only, the girl with the parrot and the two maidens who stood a little back of her, one on each side, the old man and the man with whom Northrup had struggled.

Now the girl was making swift gestures which for a little perplexed the man who watched her from above, though her companions seemed readily enough to grasp her meaning. Across the few feet which separated them, Northrup could catch their expressions as clearly as if it had been the sun instead of the round moon hanging above them. Into the eyes of the old man and the two attendant maidens came a quick look of horror; into the eyes of the other man a look of black anger.

The girl, seeing what Northrup saw, lifted her head a little higher, her eyes grown brighter, suddenly hard as rock. The gesture again and Northrup knew that it had something to do with him. For the feather-tipped willow-rod was pointed toward him, then out across the ledge where the others had gone, then to the young man before her.

The old man seemed upon the verge of speaking. But, still with locked lips, he shook his head vigorously. The girl whirled upon him, her attitude filled with sovereign menace, and he drew back swiftly as if afraid of her. The two maidens, eyes wide, lips parted breathlessly, stared in sheer amazement at her.

Again the girl with the parrot had whirled about, her back upon the old man, something of contempt in the action, her eyes blazing at the younger man. The gesture came swift and imperious. The fellow who had already felt Northrup's fist, and whose lips were swollen because he had, grew sullen, shaking his head with determined refusal.

The girl took a swift step toward him; he held his ground obstinately. Suddenly, her face showing the fury upon her, she had lifted the prayer-stick as if she would strike him with it. The thing was a slender rod which a man might break between thumb and forefinger. And yet it was the sacred *baho!*

Northrup thought that he heard a gasp; he knew that what looked like shaking fear had descended from the rod still held aloft. The old man and the young had stooped, lifting the hem of her garment, and the girl, her lips curved into a victor's smile, turned her back upon all of them and came through the defile, to the higher ledge and to Northrup's side. She flashed him a smile which, filled with triumph, was not without the warmth of the admiration which had been in her eyes when he had passed her. Then she went across the ledge, pausing at the brink to look back.

The old man and the two maidens had followed her. The other man, his face convulsed, his eyes like knives, came to where Northrup was now standing. For a moment, the two men looking into each other's eyes, had a glimpse of what might lie in the future. Then again Northrup was following his guide.

The girl, seeming satisfied, went down over the edge of the cliff. Northrup, following his guide, found other steps there, winding downward and turning about a great knob of rock. And then, startled by that which he might have expected, he was looking down into the garden with the white rock basin, the white stone columns, the pool of water and the green-leafed trees he had seen in the mirage.

Here was a third broad ledge, the cliffs at the back curving outward over it, almost like a roof. Close under this overhanging precipice was a building, rudely square, built of white stone and cement with one wide door set between two pillars of stone.

There were half a dozen square openings in the wall, their use as windows obvious. Upon the flat roof were green things growing and the great blossoms looking either white or black in the fainter light there. A temple, Northrup guessed. He was to learn differently soon.

At the side of the pool the girl with the parrot had stopped. The bird, fluttering from her wrist, perched upon a limb which bent and swayed with him. The old man and the younger one, who had guided Northrup here, made again the deep obeisance and passed on, going to the far edge of this ledge and passing down other steps, out of sight. The two attendant maidens, their eyes still wide with surprise and wonder, waited a few steps from their mistress.

Again a quick imperious gesture as she turned upon them. They moved back and away, going from her to the stone building, disappearing through the wide door. The girl who had remained turned slowly, her eyes upon Northrup.

For a little she stood looking at him with deep soberness, her oval face like a little child's in its unaffected interest and curiosity. Then suddenly—it seemed that she did all things with rare swiftness excepting when the mood or pose of languor was upon her—a smile touched her lips into gentle curves, her face dimpled up at him, from low in her throat came a little burst of laughter.

"*Ishohi!* In your big hands did Tiyo look a little bug squirming! For that, Bahana, I thank you! *Askwali!*"

"Tiyo?" grunted Northrup. "So the gentleman with the carving-knife is our old friend Tiyo, eh?"

The words, coming with the little start of surprise, found utterance quite naturally in English. In the same tongue he added,

"You pretty thing! I wonder if you know you are the prettiest girl I ever saw, red, black, yellow or white?"

She looked at him frankly puzzled, shaking her head slowly. Northrup laughed. Speaking in the tongue his many months with So Wuhti had perfected he said quickly:

"I was just mentioning my delight at meeting up with Tiyo. I have heard of him."

She showed her pleasure at his speaking words which she could understand by clapping her hands. But, again very sober in her regard of him, lifting her face upward until the wonder was he didn't kiss her tempting mouth then and there, she studied him a moment and then declared as though quite satisfied and convinced:

"You are beautiful, Bahana! You are like Sikangwunuptu! Your eyes are like the skies one sees from the mountain-tops. Your hair is like gold, more beautiful than gold."

She came closer, putting up her hand in that swift way of hers until her fingers gently brushed the hair at his temple.

"Yes, you are like the God of the Yellow Dawn."

Northrup whistled. And then, though he felt like a fool for it, he blushed. He felt his face getting red, as red as fire. The girl, seeing his embarrassment, laughed again, her mirth rippling out through the still night, as pure and clean a thing as the moonlight itself.

"You little devil!" muttered the man.

She lifted her brows, making again the sign that she did not understand. Then for an instant Northrup lost sight of her in a new vision which appeared abruptly. He had thought that Tiyo and the old priest had gone on down the rocks somewhere; evidently they had contented themselves by merely going down over the edge and remaining there just out of sight.

For, as if some one had pulled a string and they both were puppets answering to the jerk, their two heads appeared again, the old man's face twisted evilly into a crimson rage, Tiyo's eyes filled with horror and an anger like the priest's. Even the two maidens who had disappeared through the wide doorway were back at the entrance; it seemed to Northrup that their dark faces had grown ashy. He was positive that they had clutched at each other and that they were trembling. He turned questioning eyes back to the girl.

If before she had taken upon herself a seeming of queenliness, now she was like an angry goddess. A moment ago one could not have looked into the limpid, laughing pools which were her eyes and have imagined that they could change so. They blazed with an anger which was greater than Tiyo's and the priest's; they shone with a menace which was hard enough to inspire one with terror. Northrup saw that while the two men held their places there came quickly into their look a certain hint of uneasiness; the two maidens had fled into the dark interior of the stone building.

"Why do you linger, Inaa Wuhtaka (Father Old Man)?" she said with a tone which knew the way to be at once cool, steady and deadly. "Why, Tiyo, do you bring back into the presence of Yahoya your evil face, unbidden? Do you wish Yahoya's blessing? Or her curse perhaps?"

The *baho* in her hand lifted a little, a very, very little. But the gesture was significant. Both men started back as if they had been struck across the faces. Then, only anger again to be read in the priest's countenance, he began a series of frantic signs which Northrup, looking on in wonderment, was at loss to read, but which the girl seemed to grasp readily.

"Inaa," she said gently, quite as a mother might speak to a forward child, although his years must have numbered seventy at the least, while the maiden was at the first blush of womanhood. "I understand what your locked lips whisper. Your speech comes from your heart and so it is kind. But you will remember, Inaa, that though a priest you are only a man whose path goes the way soon of the Skeleton House. And you will not forget, Inaa, who is Yahoya! Go! Tiyo goes with you."

The thin old hands lifted in protest dropped hopelessly; with no word Inaa, and Tiyo with him, went over the cliffs and out of sight. Northrup, filled more than ever with curiosity, turned to the girl.

"He is like an old sheep, is Inaa," she smiled with pleasant disrespect for the cloth. "All white wool and little brain. And Tiyo—Tiyo is his son."

"And you," said Northrup, wondering at all he had seen. "You are—Yahoya, a great lady—a princess?"

Her smile was as serene as the moonbeam across the still pool as she answered him, stating quite simply as the most matter-of-fact thing in the world:

"I am Yahoya—a goddess!"

VII

"I — I see," stammered Northrup when he could think of anything to say. "I—I might have known it. I never saw a goddess before, but—oh, yes, you're a goddess, all right!"

"Yes," said Yahoya simply, dimpling at him quite like a maiden of flesh and blood, altogether adorable. "I am Yahoya, chief goddess of the 'People of the Hidden Spring,' sister of Haruing Wuhti, daughter of Cotukvnangi, god of thunder, mother of Tokila, the Night, bride of Pookhonghoya, god of war."

Northrup bowed and remembered to take off his hat. From the corner of his eye he looked at the goddess Yahoya in stupefaction. Was she poking fun at him or did she believe all of that stuff?

The question need not go begging for an answer. Her whole being breathed the certainty that she was what she had said she was. The attitude of Inaa the priest and his evil-eyed son Tiyo backed up her belief. They were all so certain of the thing that Northrup, a little dazed, asked himself:

"Well, why not? Everything happens here! Why not find oneself in the presence of deity?"

And he admitted that she looked the part —all except being the mother of Tokila, the Night, or of anything else.

"It is the Festival of Silence," the goddess was explaining to him in the same quiet way. "At such time it is death to make so much as a little sound with the lips, death to a mortal. But I, being an immortal, may do as I please. You, being bidden by me, may speak. Inaa," and she laughed again, mirthfully as at a rare thought, "Inaa is afraid of the Skeleton Old Man. But most of all is he afraid of me!"

"Yes," said Northrup, gathering his wits. "Exactly."

She turned a little and led the way close to the pool of water in the white basin, along its side and to what appeared to be a huge panther-skin cast upon the ground under a drooping tree. Here she seated herself, stretching out, making herself comfortable, lying as he knew she had been lying when the sorcery of the atmosphere had shown her to him across the desert. Even the parrot was upon a swaying branch above her.

"Be seated, Bahana," she said lightly. "We shall talk. My lips are tired with the long silence."

Northrup's tired body was not averse to accepting the invitation. He sat just at the fringe of the shadow of the tree, a few steps from her, where he could see the play of her features. And already he began to forget his weariness.

"Yesterday, in the late afternoon," he said with the impulse upon him, "you were lying here, upon the panther-skin. Your hair was loose, all about your shoulders; your little moccasins had fallen off and you did not notice. You wore a flower at your throat. Your bird was in the tree there. He dropped down and perched upon your wrist."

Yahoya, without sitting up, looked at him, a little startled, hers now the time for wonderment.

"But you were not here to see, Bahana."

"I was out yonder," he answered. " 'Way out on the desert."

"Then," she cried a little breathlessly, "you too are a god! Not a Bahana but a deity. You are perhaps him I said you looked to be, Sikangwunuptu, God of the Yellow Dawn! *Ishohi!*"

She had twisted over, her graceful body little less pantherine in its movements than had been the body upon whose skin she now lay, and slipped to her feet, standing over him.

Wondering what thing she was going to do next, Northrup sat still watching her. She was making him a curtsey or an obeisance, he wasn't quite sure which. Anyway it was pretty and decidedly worth watching. He was already asking himself why white girls didn't have half the charm of this wild thing.

"You are Sikangwunuptu!" she was crying softly. "You, a great god of the underworld, have come up to visit at the *kiva* of Yahoya, Chief Goddess of the People of the Hidden Spring! You are more beautiful than a man because you are more than a man. You have the strength of ten Tiyos because you are an immortal. See. I, too, am immortal, I, the Goddess Yahoya! And yet I, even I, kneel before Sikangwunuptu, great God of the Yellow Dawn!"

And, true enough, the impetuous creature had sunk to her knees, throwing out her round, brown arms as in supplication. The parrot, perhaps bewildered at seeing his mistress act so, gave utterance to a nervous squawk, fluttered over her head, availed himself of a vicious snap at Northrup and went back to his tree to watch.

Northrup in his wanderings up and down the world had seen little of womankind, knew little of her and her ways. In all essentials he sat spellbound for an instant, hardly grasping Yahoya's intent. But in another second when her two hands had found his two and were lifting them to her lips he realized that, savage or goddess, she was getting into the way of making him blush and that he didn't like it.

"Look here," he said quickly. "My name's Sax Northrup, if you want it. And I'm hungry."

Yahoya laughed lightly. Northrup wasn't sure that he knew what inspired her laughter. She seemed to be built of mirth. She was on her feet again in a flash, dropping him another of her quaint little bows, her dark eyes dancing. Then she had cupped her two hands to her mouth and called. Her two maidens came pattering in bare feet across the stone courtyard.

"Nayangap Mana! Tocha Mana!" she cried softly to them when, hesitant and wide-eyed, they stood before their mistress, darting swift, curious glances at Northrup. "You are in the presence of the gods!"

As if this were a signal and they grasped it instantly, the two not uncomely maidens plumped down upon their knees.

"Listen!" went on Yahoya swiftly. "He whom you see before you is one come up from the underworld to have speech with Yahoya. Guard your eyes that they go not blind with looking upon him. It is Sikangwunuptu!"

Instantly four brown hands flew up to hide four very bright and inquisitive eyes. Northrup fancied, while he was not certain, that the girl called Nayangap was peeking at him through her fingers.

"He has come running across the desert," continued Yahoya. "Therefore is he hungry. He does not carry water with him as men do; therefore he thirsts. Hasten!"

Before Northrup, missing the canteen which had been with him so long, came to remember how in a fit of anger he had thrown it away down in the cañon, Nayangap and Tocha had flitted back across the moonlit space like nimble little ghosts.

"What makes you so certain," demanded Northrup abruptly, "that you are a goddess?"

Yahoya, again making herself comfortable upon her panther rug, pondered the matter a moment.

"One just knows," she explained. "The coyote knows he is not a humming-bird and the horn toad knows he is not an eagle."

"How does it happen then that you dwell with mere mortals?"

"I tarry with them but a little while," she told him thoughtfully, her eyes upon the moon now. "My home is yonder."

"In the moon, I suppose?" he bantered.

"Yes," she answered seriously.

"But," he argued, scarcely knowing why, "you were born here, among these people, of them."

"Oh, no!" she smiled brightly, shaking her head at him. "I was not born. I have lived always. I just came."

"Then," he demanded, "how in the—how did you get here?"

"It was a night like this one, many years ago," she explained. "The moon was big, like you see it now. I floated down through the night." She laughed reminiscently. "When I appeared coming out of nothingness, singing the sacred song before Inaa, the old priest, I think he was much afraid. But he knew that a goddess had come."

There could be no doubt that she believed this rigmarole. Nor did she seem to be insane. If one were taken when she was a little girl, taught from the beginning that she was an immortal, she'd grow up into such a young woman as Yahoya was. In the old days when the divine right of kings was undisputed the princesses must have been no little like the Yahoya type. But they were only mortals!

"And of course Inaa told everybody that a goddess had come to town?"

She nodded, seeing no sacrilege in Northrup's way of speaking. Seeking beyond the mystification of her "explanation" he thought that he saw light. Priesthood often enough is synonymous with trickery; no doubt, some years ago old Inaa had needed or wanted to strengthen his prestige. It had been, no doubt, a comparatively simple thing for him to procure a pretty little girl from some distant tribe, to bring her here secretly and pass her off upon his credulous people as a divinity. It was not difficult to see how he'd strengthen his own hand in the matter. It at once amused Northrup and appealed to him as strangely pathetic that the girl herself had come to believe as the others believed.

"I suppose," he said, completing in words the thought which had suggested itself to him, "that in due course of time Inaa will marry you off to Tiyo, his son?"

"That has been his wish," she responded. "And it was mine, for in holy matters Inaa is very wise, while in other things he is stupid. But when the Man of Wisdom came, I saw it was not for me to marry Tiyo, but him."

"And who is the Man of Wisdom?"

"Oh, he is the one who teaches my people wonderful things! Such things as men know out in the world of the white man. And he tells Yahoya wonderful tales of the land where he will take her one day when she marries him—of great wagons which run uphill without horses; of wires over which people speak across many miles; of big waters with houses floating upon them; of beautiful women who wear beautiful garments."

Northrup started, a suspicion that at the jump was almost a certainty upon him.

"A tall man, thin faced, with drooping eyes?" he asked. "Very heavy eyebrows, coming together over his nose? A way of twisting his hands while he listened? He has been with you about half a year?"

Yahoya gazed at him in rapt admiration.

"You know everything, Yellow Beard!"

"I know Strang," he grunted. "And I think I know his ways. So he is going to marry you, is he?"

"Oh, yes," she dimpled at him. "That will be nice, won't it? He is not pretty like you, Yellow Beard, but then he is prettier than Tiyo. And he is white."

"On the outside," growled Northrup. "But do you think it is wise for an——"

He had started to say "an Indian girl," and thought better of it. He must try to keep in mind that she was a goddess! So he finished—

"For one of your race to marry a white man?"

She stared at him wonderingly a moment, then broke again into laughter.

"So then Yellow Beard does not know everything after all! His eyes can not see through a piece of cotton cloth. He thought that Yahoya was black like Nayangap and Tocha. Look!"

THE amazing maiden had suddenly drawn open a little her robe at the throat, showing him the merest hint of her round breast. And Northrup sat astounded. The sun and desert air had worked their will with her flower-like face and hands and arms, making them brown and dusky. But her breast was as white as milk!

"You see," she smiled quite naturally, "goddesses are white like the women of the Bahana."

"My God!" said Northrup. And then, trying to speak sternly although his voice was a trifle uncertain, "Cover yourself, child. You oughtn't to do things like that."

"Why?" she wanted to know. "Am I not pretty?"

"You are a madness-making little beauty, that's what you are," he said in English. "And besides you are an ingenuous little savage."

His anger against Strang had had many months in which to cool and it was no hard matter for Northrup's generous nature to make allowances. But suddenly the old anger was flaring out hotter than ever. It was no hard matter to see the situation through Strang's eyes. His big hands shut slowly into hard fists.

"Do you love this man, this strange Bahana?" he asked her.

Yahoya's smiling lips had turned into a pout. Her quick fingers were busy gathering her gown close up about her brown throat. She had expected him to be pleased with her, and he had seemed angry. With a quick glance Northrup saw what she was doing, glimpsed also a little gold chain about her throat, hidden in a moment by her cotton garment.

"Goddesses do not love mere men," she told him loftily.

Nayangap and Tocha came then bearing in their hands broad trays upon which were many dishes and enough food for ten men. Evidently they expected that the god Sikangwunuptu had a stomach in proportion to his might and dignity. They set down the trays, half afraid of him and yet thrilling a little with the thought of being so close to him. Then, at a curt nod from their mistress, they were gone.

"Tell me about Strang," Northrup commanded after a sip of water and beginning upon the *piki*. "Does he love you?"

"Oh, yes," Yahoya answered a little stiffly. "All men love me."

"Humph! I don't."

"You!" widening her eyes at him after a fashion peculiarly her own. "But you are not a man—you're just a god!"

"I'm no such thing," he said emphatically. "I'm a man, a white man, I hope, and my name is Sax Northrup."

"Then," she informed him demurely, "it may chance that after all I shall not marry the Man of Wisdom. For, though you growl like a bear, you are so much prettier!"

"I want to know all about Strang," said Northrup hurriedly. "He's been here over half a year. Why does he stay on so long?"

She knew perfectly well how to droop her eyelids, how to flash a sidelong glance at him, how to do whatever she pleased with her two dimples.

"It may be that he has stayed because Yahoya lingers here."

He wasn't persuaded. It might be, but it didn't sound like Strang a little bit. It was more Strang's way to get out of this with both hands filled and to a place where a man might throw his money after the sort of things which are to be found in cities of the white men.

"Also," Yahoya admitted, "it was the word of Inaa that the Bahana should not go forth to tell of the People of the Hidden Spring. He does not go out of sight of Tiyo or one of Tiyo's men."

"He is a prisoner then?"

"He is held in high respect; songs are sung for him; my people learn many things from him. But it is death for him if he tries to go away."

"Then," he asked her, "how does it happen that you count on having him show you the wonderful things of his world when you are married?"

"You ask many questions, Sax Northrup." She hesitated over the name, casting the two words into one and making quite a mess of it. "But if you must know, Yahoya and Eddie have many words in private."

"Eddie!"

"He tells me to call him that. It is nicer than Strang, and oh, so much nicer than Saxnorthrup!" She achieved the last with a little shudder and another of her sly glances at him. "If I decide to love you I shall call you Eddie!"

Northrup passed from corn-meal soup to melon, from melon back to corn-meal soup without ever realizing that his manner of eating was fascinating Yahoya. If Strang had been here all this time and had had words in private with this unsophisticated little thing, if in all that time he had not taken the trouble to enlighten her upon her possible past history, what was the answer?

The man who would leave a partner to die alone out in the desert, robbing him of his last drop of water, was not the man to be overscrupulous in his dealings with a maid. Not with a maid like Yahoya. Northrup looked at her sharply, seeking the measure of her beauty. She looked a being created all of soft curves, with tender dimples set just where they would do the most good, or the most harm, as the case might be.

"Where is Strang now? Tonight?" he asked.

"There is sickness in the tribe down by the corn meadows. Eddie has gone there to drive out the sickness and make people well."

"Whew! So he's turned doctor, has he?"

"He is the Man of Wisdom. He can do all things. He knows everything."

"He's certainly got a strangle-hold on the situation," thought Northrup.

Out of a spell of moody abstraction he was recalled to himself by the tinkle of Yahoya's laughter.

"You make faces, like this," she informed him, wrinkling her forehead into a frown and thrusting her lower jaw out at him. "It must be that you and Eddie are not good friends?"

"I don't think that we are. But look here, Yahoya, have you made up your mind that you are going to marry him?"

"Oh, yes! At the end of the Festival of Silence."

"What does Inaa say of it? And Tiyo?"

"Inaa grows very cross. And Tiyo looks at Eddie like he could eat him up. Tiyo is very sad that I don't wish to be his wife."

"You told me that before. Now the next question is, when does the Festival of Silence end?"

"With the moonset. Then I will sing the sacred song and after that my people may unlock their lips."

"And you marry Strang at dawn?"

"Yes, Saxnorthrup."

She looked at him teasingly, as if her instinct or intuition had told her that the matter displeased him and as if it were all a lark for her. But she looked a little troubled when he said shortly:

"You're going to do nothing of the sort. Not after I have a talk with your friend Eddie."

VIII

YAHOYA sat very still, half in moonlight, half in shadow, looking steadily at Northrup. He, returning her gaze, could see that in the depths of her eyes there was a light as of an inner fire.

"I wonder," she said softly, "are you Sikangwunuptu, God of the Yellow Dawn? Or are you a mere man, Saxnorthrup?"

It was not a question asked of him but of herself and he made no answer. He had told her already; now she was seeking to decide for herself. Suddenly, with that swift gracefulness which was almost like a liquid flowing, she was upon her feet, her arms thrown out toward him as he rose with her.

"What are you?" she cried, and there was passionate earnestness throbbing through her erect body, thrilling through her clear voice. "You come up like a god —a White God of the underworld! Your hair is like fine threads of gold; your eyes are like such turquoises as they do not find any more in the world, such turquoises as Haruing Wuhti wears upon her throat and arms when the Sun God comes to see how beautiful she is. Your skin where the sun has not blackened it is white like goat's milk, white and soft like Yahoya's own! Why do you come?"

She broke off suddenly. He could hear her breathing. Then, before he could answer, she had gone on impetuously, dropping her arms, moving a little closer to him.

"Do you come seeking a maiden, Yellow Beard? *Ishohi!* There is no *mana* here so beautiful as I! Look! Do you come to make my heart leap out of my side for you? It has leaped, quick, without waiting, as the white antelope leaps up when he sees the wolf. If you come seeking a maiden then, Yellow Beard, here am I, Yahoya, maiden and goddess, who will follow you into the desert if you will, or down into the underworld."

She stood so close to him now that it was almost as if he had obeyed the wild impulse upon him and was holding her in his arms. For an instant he felt that one must be more than man or less than man not to yield to her.

But his arms, lifting a little, fell again to his sides. He had one code, had Sax Northrup, and many hard years of seeking to live up to it had made him the man he was. "Accept the chances which the game of life presents, but play the game square!" If ever there was call upon him for fair play it was now.

"Yahoya!" He sought to speak sternly, but his voice was uncertain, catching a little in his throat. "There is moon-madness upon you. You don't know what it is you are saying."

She looked at him with a curious smile, in which were oddly mingled wonder and confidence.

"Must Yahoya twist her lips into lies when her lover comes?" she asked softly. "Must she hide her heart because it loves you, Yellow Beard?"

"You are talking nonsense," he said harshly. "You don't love me and there's no reason why you should. Love doesn't come this way, in a hurry. Just because you are used to Indians about you and I am the first white man——"

"You forget Eddie," she dimpled at him, still confident and undisturbed by his words. "I did not love Eddie."

"Thank God for that! But that's no reason you should think you love me. Nor any reason that I should love you."

She laughed at his earnestness.

"Your lips lie well for you, Saxnorthrup. But in your eyes I saw the truth before you hid it. When you lifted your arms a little, like this——"

Already did Northrup, thinking of the coming dawn, foresee complication enough without this. Feeling that he must settle this matter while the strength of will was with him, he said in well simulated anger:

"Yahoya, listen to me. I did not come here seeking a maiden. I came looking for gold and turquoises. I have need of them, not of a *mana*. You do not love me and I do not love you. Do you understand?"

He marveled at the lightning-swift changes which seemed so natural to this girl. In a flash the erect body had grown rigid, the laughing mouth hardened cruelly, the dark eyes were flashing at him as he had seen them flash at old Inaa in a moment of anger.

"So," she said, and her voice was steady and low, but as hard as flint. "So you come but to make mock of me? Is that it? I offer you my love and you push it aside to seize upon gold and cold stones! You dare—you *dare* make light of Yahoya's love?"

Northrup watched her, uncertain of the answer to make.

"If you are a god," she said in the same cold voice, "I, too, am a goddess; then the time will come when I shall learn how to make you twist your great body in suffering. If you are but a man——"

She stooped swiftly, snatching up the prayer-stick from the grass.

"If you are but a man," and she stretched it out over him, "I have but to touch you with this and you wither and die!"

"Try it," he said bluntly. "You might kill a lizard with it; nothing more."

A moment she seemed to hesitate, in deadly earnest, filled with assurance that her curse would annihilate him. Then she dropped the *baho* to the grass again.

"I think," she said quietly, "that I shall wait until the dawn. That then I shall call and Tiyo and the others at my command will hurl you out from the rocks. And I shall laugh at you while you die horribly, Yellow Beard!"

"I'll plug a dozen of them full of holes first," grunted Northrup, a real anger beginning to grow within him.

God knew he was but seeking to befriend her and that she needed a man to lift a curse from her. And all that he was getting by way of reward was a threat of death.

"Yahoya," he said after the flash of anger, forcing himself to a sane line of thought. "I want to tell you something. Will you listen to me and try to understand?"

Now he was the one supplicating; now there was a note of eager pleading in his voice and she was the one who could deny.

"Yahoya has wasted enough time amusing herself with a new plaything," she said with her quaint little queenly air. "Now she must go and prepare for the bridal ceremony."

She took a step to pass him, but Northrup set himself stubbornly in her path.

"Stand aside!" she commanded him. "Or shall I call for Tiyo and his men?"

"What are you going to do?" he demanded. "Are you going on with this mad wedding?"

"At the dawn," she informed him coolly, "Yahoya will become the bride of the Man of Wisdom. After that she will do what she likes. It may be that she will have Tiyo throw Eddie down the cliffs; it may be that she will become a bride again to Tiyo; it may be that she will have Tiyo throw Yellow Beard down to join the other Bahana! Whatever the Goddess Yahoya wishes done, that thing will be done. And now, will you stand aside for me to pass?"

"No!" snapped Northrup. "You are going to listen to me if I have to hold you while you do it."

"You would lay your hand on Yahoya?"

The wonder at him stood high in her eyes, but back of it was a quick look of admiration. Certainly this man dared much.

"I'll take you across my knee and spank you in a minute!" he told her in mystifying English.

"Are those magic words, Yellow Beard?" she asked quite seriously.

Northrup grinned a little.

"They are very magic words, sometimes," he told her. "They have been known to work wonders with little girls who didn't mind properly. I want to talk with you, about you, Yahoya. Before it is too late."

Perhaps it was his earnestness which held her; perhaps just the curiosity to know what it was he had to say of her. She turned back, again making herself comfortable upon her rug.

"Now," and it was with a sigh of relief that he began, "I want you to tell me again of your coming here. Did Inaa, by any chance, save any of the garments which you wore?"

"I came down from the emptiness of night," she told him. "My robe was built of moonlight and mist."

"It's a wonder you didn't catch cold," he grinned at her, and he thought that she had to fight back an answering smile. "So nothing that you wore has been saved?"

"This only," and her fingers at her throat showed him a glimpse of the gold chain. "This came with me from the moon and is a magic thing."

He put out his hand eagerly for it. It might be that after all she had carried with her through the years a locket which would establish her identity—if he could ever get her out of this!

"Let me look at it."

She shook her head.

"It has never left my throat but the one time for a goldsmith to lengthen it. To take it off would bring evil. But since you are curious, Saxnorthrup, and since it may happen that you will die in a few hours, you may come close and look."

Northrup bent over her, drawing the chain out from under her robe. From the slender chain hung a little locket, plain gold. He found the spring, the locket flew open. Within was the picture of a young woman who, in this light, might have been Yahoya herself. Opposite the picture were some two or three words engraved, a full name he hoped. But he could not make them out.

Well, this was something. If he ever got out and got Yahoya away with him, he'd never rest until he could tell her who she was.

"About the time that you came here," he asked, "do you remember that the body of a white man or woman was found anywhere in the desert? Where they had given out, starving, dying of thirst or a rattlesnake bite? And quite near the spot where you appeared before Inaa?"

"No," she answered, obviously puzzled. "Why do you ask that, Yellow Beard?"

"This is the thing which I wanted to tell you, Yahoya."

There he stopped hesitantly, trying to see just how to go about telling a goddess that she was just a girl in spite of her many years of belief to the contrary.

"A good many years ago," he began slowly, "some people, a man and a woman and a little girl, perhaps, sought to cross the desert. God knows what drove them or lured them. We may never know that, Yahoya, or it may be that we shall find out sometime. At any rate, just before they came this far, they died. Perhaps their water gave out. The man would try to save his water for the woman; she would let her little girl drink and go thirsty herself. So it might happen that both man and woman would die and the little girl live."

He paused again, looking at her to see if she began to understand. She was looking at him intently.

"Go on," she commanded. "The little girl, what became of her?"

"They were white people, Yahoya. The little girl was too little to understand all that had happened. Maybe her mother, dying, or her father, told her to go on toward the cliffs where they had thought they saw a man. The man they saw was Inaa, and the little white girl was—you, Yahoya!"

For a long time she sat still and silent, staring at him in sheer wonder. Yahoya not a goddess! Yahoya a white girl, the daughter of a white man and woman who had perished miserably on the desert!

Northrup, seeing the rise and fall of her breast in the moonlight, the look which had crept into her wide eyes, wondered what tumult of thoughts had seethed into her brain at his words. It did not enter his mind that she would not believe him.

But he had not counted sufficiently upon what a dozen years of training had done for her. She had been very, very little when she had come to the People of the Hidden Spring. Inaa had told her that she was a goddess and had bade his people worship her.

She had heard over and over and over the tale of her coming down through the night from her distant home in the moon; the tale, oft repeated, had grown into fact. She did not remember her father and mother dying of thirst; she thought that she did remember her floating down to earth among the stars which worshiped her as she went by. She had been reared to a belief, a religion, which never a doubt had assailed. A confidence like hers was not to be shaken by the words of the first man who said:

"You are no goddess, but a mortal Bahana!"

"So you dare say to me, Yellow Beard, that Yahoya is no true goddess but an impostor? Is that it?"

"What I have to say is that old Inaa is a —— scoundrel who has used you for his own purposes," muttered Northrup. "You are a girl, just a girl, and God knows there is nothing more wonderful than that in the world. A girl to whom the going back to the world of her kind will be nothing short of dipping into fairyland."

Yahoya's sudden laughter surprised him.

"Fool!" she called him. "Fool and liar! To think that I would believe such wild tales. It would be well if you remembered that you are but a Bahana, Saxnorthrup, while I am Yahoya."

And he put out no hand now to stop her as she went swiftly toward the stone edifice under the overhanging cliffs.

"Here's a pretty game for a man to play out," he grunted when she was gone. "If she were just plain girl things would be bad enough. But being a goddess to boot——"

Here he broke off. Yahoya had left her panther-skin behind her. Northrup rolled up in it and went to sleep.

IX

IN SPITE of the fatigue resting like a dead weight upon him Northrup dozed more than slept that night, waking often. His destiny had brought to him a responsibility which he accepted unquestioningly.

The whole future life and happiness of an extremely unsophisticated girl was upon his shoulders and if he played the game fair he had her hand as well as his own to play. These thoughts alone were sufficient to restrain him from yielding to heavy sleep. And, allied with them, was the feeling that his new acquaintance, Tiyo, might not be averse to creeping up upon him and driving a knife into him.

Through the night he gained the impression that Yahoya had not gone to bed. Now and then a light moved across the door of her stone habitation; once or twice he thought that he heard her voice giving commands to her attendant maidens. Once he was certain that it was her laugh, as carefree as if she had never known a shadow of trouble or anxiety in her life, that woke him.

The moon had long passed the zenith and from bright silver had turned to a milky whiteness when he started up to a new sound. Since coming to this strange place he had heard no voice save his own and Yahoya's; she herself had told him that no one would dare speak until she had stood out upon the cliff's edge and sung the sacred song. But now from the stone house came not only her voice but the low rumble of a man's utterance. And the tone was hard, menacing, oddly unpleasant.

Northrup got to his feet, stretching his body to get the stiffness out of it. He took the gun out of its holster and examined it to be sure that the clip was full, that it might be relied upon in case of need. His first thought was that the voice was Strang's.

"It will be dawn in an hour," he thought. "I wonder what the new day is bringing for all of us?"

He went to the western edge of the cliffs and looked down. There was the headquarters of the tribe. He could see ledges and steps cut into the face of the precipice, could make out countless orifices, rudely circular, which no doubt led into intricate passageways and numerous small chambers.

He noted swiftly that the stairways and ledges seemed alive with figures of men, women and children, and that in long streams they were moving downward into the cañon below. Down there were many other figures, clustering in groups where their fires burned. Northrup saw with a frown what they were doing. Everywhere were great jugs, and from jug to jug the men were passing, drinking. He saw that many of them walked with the unsteady step of drunkenness. And all in silence—silence, absolute, unbroken by so much as a whisper; silence hovering over a drunken carousal!

"When they start things going," he muttered, "where is it going to end?"

Yahoya's face, the clear-eyed, frank, ingenuous face of a girl who should be wearing her first party gown, flushed with the triumph of her first season, rose before him. If she had only realized the horror of the position in which she stood it seemed to Northrup that the situation would have been a shade less terrible. But her calm serenity in the face of all that encompassed her, her dimpling assurance that she was the Goddess Yahoya, only to be adored and not to be harmed, made him feel toward her as he might have felt toward a child cooing its happiness over a new discovery as it crept toward a rattlesnake.

He shuddered at the thought and, turning away from the silent orgy below, went with guarded steps toward the stone building.

The low rumble of the man's voice, rasping impatiently now, was not Strang's voice. Northrup realized that before he had gone ten steps. He moved on quietly, coming to the door.

He looked into the one large room which constituted the greater part of the building's interior; saw that upon each side a smaller door led into what was apparently merely an anteroom of some sort; saw Yahoya, her two maidens and the man who was speaking swiftly. The man was Inaa, the old priest. His attitude was plainly one of dominance and threat now; Yahoya's eyes were filled with amazement. Northrup guessed quickly that never had a man spoken to her like this before.

So intent were the four upon what Inaa was saying that none of them noted the tall form in the shadow outside. Yahoya was seated upon some sort of chair over which a robe of white skins had been thrown.

For a long moment Northrup's eyes clung to her, wonderingly. Until now he had not been struck with the full measure of her beauty. Now was there excuse enough for superstitious minds to believe her what she believed herself.

There were a score of little lamps in the room, set in niches or upon squared stones, the cotton wicks soaked in oil shedding a bright, soft light. Northrup saw that the girl's eyes were not black but a deep, fathomless gray; that her hair was not the night-black hair of Nayangap and Tocha but a rich, sun-kissed brown.

The hair was arranged as the native brides wear it, in two great whorls, one at each ear, held back from the forehead by a broad band of gold above the brows. A great turquoise, catching many lights from the lamps, shone from the middle of the golden band.

The cotton gown of the early evening together with the broad blue sash had been discarded for the bridal gown. This was of some stuff which could not be but which looked the finest silk, snow-white, a clinging garment which fitted the tender form perfectly, which left the arms bare, which showed a glimpse of the whiteness of the young breast.

The band about her slim waist was a girdle of gold, beaten into little squares joined cunningly, each adorned with a pendent turquoise. Her feet, encased in snow-white buckskin moccasins, were crossed before her upon the loose folds of the white robe.

Nayangap and Tocha stood one at each side of their mistress, their black eyes wide and startled, their lips parted, a look of fear upon each face. Inaa's back was toward Northrup. The old man's form was tense, his voice vibrant with the emotion riding him.

"It is death to break silence during the Festival of Silence," Yahoya was saying now quite calmly, a little curl of contempt touching her mouth. "You will go down to the Skeleton House, Inaa, before the day is born and dies again!"

Inaa's grunt was eloquent of his defiance.

"Will you not let the maidens go, oh, Yahoya?" he demanded in a tone which told that the same demand before had met with her refusal. "The thing which I have to say, for which I have dared break silence before the time, is not for them to hear."

"I have told you," she answered him steadily, "that it is my will that my maidens stay with me. Surely with old age madness has come upon you! You are great among your people, Inaa, but do you forget that you are only an old man, soon to die? The Skeleton Old Man has one hand upon your beard now! Be careful what you say, how you speak to Yahoya!"

Again Inaa's grunt, making Northrup vaguely uneasy. The old man was unmoved by Yahoya's words, and his attitude was plainly untinged by respect.

"Let the maids stay," he said gruffly. "It matters not. If," and as he turned a little Northrup could see the evil glance he shot at them, making them cringe back from it, "if they speak later of what happens here tonight they will go at once and for all time to a lover who has cold arms and lies in darkness."

He paused a moment, staring from under his gathered brows at Yahoya. Then he spoke swiftly, his voice lowered, unspeakably stern.

"There is little time, for what I have to say must be finished before the first dawn comes. Yahoya, at dawn you will sing the sacred song?"

"Will the sun rise?" she mocked him.

"And afterward," he retorted, "you will wed?"

"Do you think," she answered, her tone filled with sarcasm, "that Yahoya can find a man among all these men who will wed with so ugly a *mana?*"

"You think that you will put out your hand and that the Man of Wisdom will come? You will wed him?"

"Oho!" she laughed, leaning a little forward, her mocking eyes upon the old priest's. "And are you jealous, Inaa? With madness has youth run back into your cold blood, making it hot again? Do you covet Yahoya!"

And again she flung her laughter at him, playing with him, finding vent for the anger which he had whipped up in her. Inaa lifted his hand as if to stop her. And Yahoya's laughter taunted him until she had done.

"It is my desire," he said angrily, "that you wed one of my own people. It is my desire, Yahoya, that you wed Tiyo, my son. It is also his desire. And," the words coming coldly, "it is my command!"

SLOWLY Yahoya's face went white. She did not move but seemed for a long moment a statue ready to be wakened into life but as yet cold marble.

Then the blood sprang back into her cheeks, racing hotly through her veins, a red tide of anger. Northrup drew a deep breath and stared at her fascinated, forgetful for the instant of Inaa. The girl stirred a little where she sat, then grew still, only her quick breathing and flashing eyes and the color in her cheeks hinting at the tumult in her breast.

"The others are drinking in the cañon," she said coolly. "Have you too drunk deeply, Inaa? Or are you eager to have the vengeance of Yahoya strike?"

"Fool!" snarled Inaa. "Must I, though an old man, be afraid of you, a soft-bodied girl? For the thing I have to tell you, Yahoya, is that you are a girl and no goddess; just a girl as Nayangap there and Tocha, but with the white body of the Bahana."

Northrup felt that he could have patted the old villain on the back for that. For, if anything were to be done for her, the sooner Yahoya got her ideas of her own divinity out of her head, the better.

"A girl, a girl with white skin, but just a girl," he gibed, mocking her as she had mocked him. "A girl I put where she is; a girl I can pull down and give to the village to play with when I wish. Would you like, oh, dainty Yahoya, to have the hard hands of many drunken men pull you this way and that? Or would you like to obey the command of Inaa and wed Tiyo—and so remain to the people what Inaa made you, a goddess? You must decide swiftly, for the dawn is coming and does not wait, Yahoya, because a white maid bids it to!"

Nayangap and Tocha gasped, turning their bewildered eyes from their mistress to the old priest, back to where Yahoya sat motionless.

Slowly now Yahoya stirred, her gaze going to Nayangap, then to Tocha.

"You have heard Inaa speak," she said very quietly. "You have seen one high in the thoughts of the gods stricken with madness. In a little those gods will gather him to them, Nayangap and Tocha. You will see; his death has left the underworld to bring him thither. And harken well—" her voice rising a little—"you maidens who have heard must forget that you have heard! I have commanded, I, Yahoya!"

Even yet she did not believe. Though two men had told her, first Northrup, who claimed her one of his own blood, next Inaa, who told her of his own trickery, Yahoya would not believe. Too deeply had the training of a lifetime sunken into her mind to be wiped out in an instant.

Inaa's rage, curbed until now, burst its bonds. With black, distorted face, with his hands thrown out like claws of a beast, he leaped at her.

"Goddess, are you, Yahoya?" he snarled at her. "Inaa will teach wisdom to a white-bodied fool! If you are goddess and no maid then may you fling an old man away with no effort."

Northrup, unprepared for the sudden attack, saw Yahoya dragged from her seat, dragged down so that she was upon her knees, the priest's hands at her throat. Yahoya struggled, but his strength in his rage was ten times the strength of a girl, and she could not so much as cry out. Her two maids stood transfixed with horror.

It was but an instant. Northrup, gathering his strength in a sudden flare of anger scarcely less than the frenzy of Inaa, threw himself upon the old man, gripped his wrists and ripped them away, flinging Inaa far from him so that he staggered across the room and struck the far wall.

"You infernal cur!" cried the white man.

He turned away from the blinking, evil eyes to where Yahoya, white-faced and panting, was staring at them like one rudely awaked from a nightmare.

"Why won't you believe?" he asked her sharply. "It is almost the dawn; your whole life is in your hands now for a few minutes. Why spoil it with an insane idea? Can't you see that you are just a girl, as he says? My God! Won't you see it?"

In the girl's eyes were so many emotions striving for mastery over her that Northrup could not guess what passed in her mind. She opened her lips but did not speak. He had felt a little spurt of anger at her, too, that she let her stubbornness lie in the way of her welfare. Now he felt only a deep pity for her. In a rude moment he and Inaa had tried to wrest from under her feet the whole belief of her life. Small wonder that she stared at them like that!

"Yahoya," he went on gently, "can't you understand it? And can't you see that it is a better thing to be a white girl after all than a goddess of these cursed Indians? Why, a world is open to you now that is as wonderful as the world of the gods which you have let yourself dream of. It will be like paradise for a girl at your age to come into the Twentieth Century outside!

And—" again under the emotion upon him he broke into quick English—"if you'll just buck up I'll send you out of this mess if we have to shoot our way out!"

Yahoya, looking at him a moment curiously, turned and without a word went into the anteroom at the left, dropping a curtain after her. Northrup swung about, seeking Inaa. The old man had slipped away.

X

"GO TO your mistress!" Northrup commanded the two trembling girls. "And remember, goddess or maid, she is your mistress!"

He went outside. Yahoya must have time to think before he tried further to talk with her. And he himself wanted to think. Inaa, none too sweet-tempered an old rascal at the best, would be up to mischief now. His anger would include Northrup as well as Yahoya. It would be just as well to look for nearly anything now.

But he had not looked for what had already begun. His eyes, seeking Inaa, had gone naturally to the far edge of the cliff where the steps of stone led down to the cañon where the tribe was drinking. He did not see Inaa, but saw a head rising as a man climbed upward. At first he had no suspicion who the man was, as Strang had gone from his mind, and this was not the Strang he had known.

Strang's breast showed as he came up. Then, from the base of the cliff what had looked a shadow there resolved itself into a man's form, leaping out upon Strang. The moonlight fell upon the fellow and showed Northrup Tiyo's dark face, the teeth showing, the eyes gleaming murderously. The knife which already had threatened Northrup was flung up above Strang's head.

The two white men must have seen the Indian at the same moment. Simultaneously their quick cries shot through the stillness. Strang leaped up the last of the steps, throwing himself to the side as Tiyo came at him. He had had but the instant to decide and had decided upon taking the chance here upon the level rather than seeking to descend a hazardous way, leaving his enemy over him.

But Tiyo had had time to plan for all things. As Strang turned to the side the Indian sprang upon him. Northrup saw the moonlight gleam on the uplifted blade, heard the little grunt with which Tiyo brought it down, heard the thud of the impact and for the second thought that all of Strang's accounts were squared.

Then, gripping his automatic, having no chance to shoot from here, he ran to the two forms which were rolling close to the precipice. As he leaped forward, Yahoya, having heard the cries, came running by her maidens to stand in the doorway, watching them.

Tiyo's knife had drunk blood, but not from the body of the writhing man, having found a sheath only in the outflung forearm. Now Strang, a tall man, made into iron from his months on the desert, was fighting as a maddened animal fights for its life. His hand had grown into a steel band about Tiyo's wrist, was forcing the knife back from him. And still, like two great fighting cats, the two men now were almost at the edge of nothingness.

The Indian, seeing a chance, dropped his knife so that it fell against the rock floor at his left side. As quick as lightning he had swept it up again in his left hand, had whipped it up so that again it caught the moonlight. And then Northrup, throwing himself forward, was in time. His great fingers shut about the Indian's left wrist, gripping it as Strang gripped the other.

A moment of breathless struggle in which the muscles of the three men stood out mightily. Then the three bodies relaxed as the knife came away in Northrup's hand, and Strang and Tiyo, rolling over swiftly, got to their feet.

"Well done, Yellow Beard!"

Yahoya's young voice came ringing to them; Yahoya herself had come quickly to Northrup's side, looking up into his face. And again the man saw in the woman's face, unhidden, the admiration which looked out at him frankly.

Beyond the emotion which he had aroused in her she seemed unmoved by what she had seen. She was laughing softly when she said:

"It is in Yahoya's heart to make you love her, Saxnorthrup."

Strang whirled about suddenly. Until now his watchful eyes had been for Tiyo alone. The name, even as Yahoya pronounced it, brought him peering into Northrup's face.

"Northrup!" There was almost a gasp

of fear in the voice. "You—you didn't die then?"

"I think not," Northrup assured him coolly. "Otherwise I should not have had the privilege of saving you a throat-cutting."

"—— him!" spat out Strang, his eyes again going to the Indian. "I'll get him for this."

Tiyo's face, a moment ago a picture of the hot rage and hatred within him, now showed nothing. With an elaborate assumption of nonchalance, he lifted his shoulders and turned to go down the steps. Northrup, watching him go, noted that not once had the man spoken, that now his lips were sealed. The suspicion came to him that Tiyo, like the rest of his simple people, had been tricked by the old priest into a certainty that Yahoya was a goddess and did not dare speak until she, singing the sacred song, had given the signal.

"So you are alive?" demanded Strang as if he could not be convinced. "And you have got here?"

He was frowning, his eyes deeply thoughtful. He seemed already to have forgotten Tiyo and that but for Northrup's coming Tiyo's knife would have drunk more deeply. There was no gratitude in his sharp glance; but there was displeasure and suspicion. As quick as a flash his eyes went from Northrup to Yahoya's face where a man must read what she did not seek to hide.

"Curse it!" cried Strang. "Haven't I got enough on my hands already? What the devil do you want here?"

Northrup grunted his disgust of the man.

"In the first place," he said coolly, "I want a talk with you. And I want it right now, before daybreak. If you've got a shred of decency in you, if you've got a drop of sporting blood, which I don't believe you have, I have a proposition to make you."

STRANG, gripping his wounded arm as he followed, they went back into Yahoya's house. For Northrup wanted what privacy there was to be had. And he wanted what light he might have upon Strang's face.

Yahoya, unbidden but frankly interested, went with them. As they began speaking in a language which was unknown to her, she frowned a little and watched them the more closely.

"Here's a girl who's in a nasty mess," Northrup began abruptly. "She's white and she's the plaything of a dirty old savage. We've got to get her out of this. It's a sight more than a one-man job or I wouldn't ask your help. The mere fact that there is no love between you and me doesn't cut any figure in a case like this. Will you tuck in and help me get her out?"

Strang's head was down as he sought to bind up his wound. When he looked up it was first at Yahoya. He studied her face intently, then turned to Northrup. Then of Northrup he demanded sharply:

"Have you talked with her? Do you understand their lingo?"

"Yes."

"What have you told her? Does she know that the goddess stuff is all bunk?"

"I have told her. But she doesn't believe me. Inaa told her and she thought that he was lying."

There was a gleam in Strang's eye which told Northrup what he might expect even before Strang's voice demanded bluntly:

"Well? If she wants to believe it, what's the difference?"

"What difference?" cried Northrup hotly. "We've got to get her out, I tell you. And it looks as if we'd have to go on the run. Unless she gets that fool notion out of her head, I've got my doubts if she'll be willing to go with us and leave what she looks upon as her people."

Strang's brows contracted into a quick frown.

"I know your sort pretty well, Sax Northrup," he said sharply. "You're the kind of man who likes to run things pretty much his own way and to —— with the other fellow. Here you butt in where I've been six months and at the jump are telling me what 'we' are going to do! Hasn't it entered your head that perhaps I've decided for myself what I am going to do? And what this girl is going to do? And, by Heaven! You can put it in your pipe and smoke it right now that she is going to do what I tell her to do!"

Northrup bit back the words which came to his lips. Now was no time to quarrel with Strang. And, since no human being is altogether vicious, he still hoped to find a hint of decency somewhere in Strang.

"Would you mind telling me what your

plans are?" he asked quietly. "Things are going to happen pretty fast now, you know."

A little color came into Strang's bronzed cheeks, a quick bright light like a flame into his eyes.

"So you'll listen to reason, will you?" he demanded, making the mistake of thinking himself the bigger man at that moment. "You can just bet things are going to happen in a hurry. I'm going to get Tiyo's tag to begin with, the murderous young hound! And I'm going to put a crimp into Inaa's game that will make him dizzy. And, so that you won't make any mistakes, Northrup, I'll tell you right now who's runnin' the whole show here. It's Ed Strang! What I've got I'm going to hold on to; what I haven't got—I'm going to get. And I'm going to keep it—just as long as I want it!"

His eyes went swiftly to the splendid form of Yahoya, clung there a moment and then, defiantly, came back to Northrup.

"You are just one man against a whole tribe," Northrup reminded him, keeping the anger out of his voice though for an instant his eyes were on fire with it. "Has it occurred to you that they will let you go just as far as it pleases them? And that then they will know how to bring you up with a rather ugly jerk?"

Strang's air while he was speaking had subtly changed. Now, if in truth he were not the master of the situation, he thought that he was. From confidence he went to insolence.

"I've been here six months, you've been here a few hours, and so you advise and warn," he laughed impudently. "And, if you want to know, I am not one man against a tribe. The tribe is split square in two, and by ——! I'm the man that split it! Inaa is going down to make room for another man who's hungering after his job. Tiyo is going the same way to make place for a sort of tribal captain who belongs to me. Do you begin to see, Sax Northrup?"

Northrup saw, knew that Strang was telling him the truth, and understood that in sober truth Strang might have made himself the power to reckon with here. Then Yahoya . . .

"It won't work," he said quietly. "You can't get away with it, Strang, and you ought to know it. You might put it over for a while, but the bottom will drop out of the whole thing sooner or later. And I think it will be sooner."

"It will, will it? You wouldn't mind explaining how and why?"

"Because where one white man has gone another follows. Where two have been many will come. If I don't take this girl out with me I'll come back for her. And I won't come alone."

Again Strang's assurance rang in his laugh.

"Has the thought occurred to you that maybe you won't go out at all?"

Northrup stared at him incredulously. Strang had risen, or fallen, to levels Northrup had not thought open to him.

"Frankly, it hadn't. I generally go where I want to go. While we are threshing things out you might tell me what you are driving at."

"I'm driving at this: I've stumbled on to something here which, if I work it the one right way, will put me in a place where I can make the Astors and Morgans shine my shoes. If I let you go your way out of here to blab, I stand to lose the whole thing. So you are not going to get out! Is that plain enough?"

"You're taking over a pretty big contract, aren't you?" asked Northrup steadily. "I don't see how you're going to prevent me going out, unless you get some of your friends to stick a knife into me. And you won't do that."

"How do you know I won't?" snapped Strang.

"Because you haven't got the nerve," retorted Northrup. "I know your kind, too. You'd go off and leave a man to die alone in the desert, because you're an infernal coward! Too much of a coward to kill a man or to make somebody else do it. You're short on nerve, Strang."

Strang's lips twitched a little, but his eyes held hard to Northrup's, and the cool dare in them. After a brief, hesitant moment he whirled about and went to the door. Yahoya, who had guessed what she might of the conversation, flashed a quick glance at Northrup and smiled.

Almost immediately Strang came back. He pointed outside. Northrup, looking, saw six men, one after the other, come silently up from the cañon. He noted that all, excepting one only, were tall, sinewy young men of superb physiques, and that they were fully armed, each carrying two great-bladed knives at his belt, and in his hand a short thrusting-spear. The one man who had passed the prime of life looked a patriarch. Hair and beard were snow white; he was great-framed and erect; his eyes flashed as if with youth.

"Inaa's successor," said Strang, taking on again his marked manner of one supreme in power. "And the first of the young men is Muyingwa who is hungering after Tiyo's job. They are friends of mine, as you call them, Northrup. Don't forget that. And there are more of them coming."

"And I can drop the whole gang in their tracks if need be before they can get within knifing distance," answered Northrup, understanding what lay back of Strang's air of authority.

"And in the end get a two-edged knife through you," came the swift answer. "You know that. You wouldn't have a chance in the world. If you did get away for the minute, what would you do? Run out into the desert without taking time to get a drink of water, eh?"

"Go ahead, Strang. You haven't entirely outlined your plan."

"So you're ready to walk easy and talk easier, are you?" sneered Strang.

Still standing at the door he flung out his hand a trifle theatrically. The six men stopped dead in their tracks. He turned a smile upon Northrup.

"You see? Now maybe you'll listen. I haven't got anything against you, Northrup, and I'd let you go and be glad of it if I could. But I tell you I can't work this game in a day. It's too big; the stakes—I tell you I can make the big men on Wall Street look sick! If I took a chance on you and you squealed when you got out, then what? I can't do it."

"That's about enough sop to your conscience," cut in Northrup. "What do you think you are going to do with me?"

"I'm going to keep you here until I can get out. I need a man like you. There are mines here, gold-mines—it makes me dizzy to think about it—which these fool Indians have never worked beyond scratching the top like a flock of clucking hens! You are going into the mines; you are going to drive the men I give you and drive them hard. You are going to clean up more money for me than you ever saw. And when I get away and it goes with me, then you can do as you —— please!"

"Many thanks," said Northrup dryly. "It doesn't sound good to me, Strang."

Before Strang could answer, the young Indian whom he had made known as Muyingwa came on, leaving his fellows. He raised his hand in salute twice, first to Strang, second to Yahoya.

His eyes ran by them all, flashed a greeting which was filled with triumph at the girl Nayangap, standing in the anteroom door. Then, his eyes upon Strang, he lifted his hand and pointed toward the east.

It was the first light of the dawn.

Northrup swung about toward Yahoya.

"Yahoya," he said quickly, "you must listen to me."

"I listen, Yellow Beard," she said, looking at him curiously.

"What do you want to talk to her about?" demanded Strang in sharp suspicion. "Keep your hands off, Sax Northrup. She's mine, and you will do well to keep it in mind."

"Yours? You contemptible coward!" Northrup flung at him, his anger at last snapping its leash. "You would trade on her superstition and ignorance and then throw her away when you got tired, would you? Now I am going to talk with her and you are going outside while I do it."

"Am I?" jeered Strang. "So you've got a notion to the pretty innocent yourself, have you? If you think I've kept my hands off her this long just so you can have her——"

Northrup shut Strang's mouth with a blow which brought the blood and sent Strang reeling out through the door.

"Come in and I'll kill you," he said, his voice dropped low and grown husky. "I mean that, Strang."

Strang hesitated, then went swiftly to Muyingwa and the others who had come closer. Northrup paid no further attention to him save always to keep him in sight.

"Yahoya," he said as gently as he could with the emotions riding him. "You must believe me. You are a girl, a Bahana like me. Inaa has tricked you. Strang knows it. Strang is a bad man in a good many ways, Yahoya. I'd rather see you marry Tiyo than him. Tiyo at least loves you, I think. Strang plans on getting rid of Tiyo and Inaa, on putting two other men in their places—that old man out there and Muyingwa. Then Strang will be chief man here and he will do what he pleases with you. Do you understand, Yahoya?"

"I understand," she said curiously, "that you say I am no true goddess but a mere girl, like Nayangap and Tocha there, but white. Why do you lie to me, Yellow Beard?"

"Lie to you?" he cried. "Can't you see it's the truth. Cut your hand and it will bleed; put it in the fire and the fire will burn it; go without food and water and you will die like the rest of us! Can't you see? You're just a God-blessed girl, Yahoya, and no goddess."

She shook her head, the odd smile still in her eyes.

"The dawn is coming, Yellow Beard," she said softly. "I must go. The people wait for Yahoya."

"But," he cried after her, "you must not marry Strang——"

"The Goddess Yahoya promised," she told him steadily. "A goddess must not lie."

XI

NOT the most patient of men, Northrup was tempted to express himself in very strong words and to inform Miss Yahoya that from now on she could do as she pleased for all of him, either go to Strang or the devil and be done with it. Nor did the smile which she turned on Strang as she went by him soften Northrup's mood.

"I have broken the sacred silence, O Yahoya, goddess!" Strang was scarcely more than whispering and yet Northrup's eager ears caught the words clearly enough. "But it was because harm was threatened you and I feared for you. Am I forgiven?"

"Am I true goddess, then, Eddie?" she asked softly.

"The white man in yonder says you are not," he answered quickly, his eyes watchful of her slightest change of expression. "He is a liar. Inaa says you are not; he is a false priest, bewitched. They shall both suffer for it, Yahoya. Tiyo denies your godliness. He too shall suffer. Shall they not, Yahoya?"

"Take them when you will!" she said, her eyes flaming; and so she passed on.

Northrup shrugged his shoulders. He told himself that he had done his best and that he were a mad fool to attempt anything further in the face of what confronted him. But since madness had the way of galloping down his blood when crises came, he was by no means sure what the ending might be. He knew that he would watch; that if Strang or his crowd sought to lay hands on one Sax Northrup, there was going to be a fight worth a man's while.

As Yahoya, walking erect and swiftly across the level space, came to the cliff's edge, Strang, followed by the old patriarchal figure, Muyingwa and the other young men, went close behind her. Northrup noted the glance which passed between Muyingwa and the girl, Nayangap, a glance easily understood since there was not much difference between it and the glance which might pass between two young people in a box at the opera. Then Northrup strode out after the others.

If there was to be a fight it was well to plan a bit while there was time. He forced his mind to this now and away from Yahoya.

He saw that the Indians, heavily armed as they were, might be held off by a man with an automatic and plenty of ammunition. He saw that if Strang carried a gun it was hidden about his clothes. He did not believe that Strang had any sort of firearm upon him. It would have been the natural thing for the man's hand to have gone its way to his hip when Northrup had struck him in the mouth; and he had made no such gesture. There were a thousand ways in which a man, out on the desert for months, might have lost his weapon.

"If I'm the only man here with a gun," pondered Northrup, "they'll have their work cut out for them if they start anything."

He could withdraw toward the other steps, up which he had come from the first cañon. In the narrow passageway he could hold them back while he swept up the jug of water. After that, what was to be would be.

The dawn had come at last. Yahoya, standing upon the brink of the precipice, stood very still, her head thrown back a little, her eyes upon the pale moon, her arms lifted. Northrup came closer to the edge and looked down.

The dark forms there were quiet, had grown as motionless as Yahoya's own. The whole tribe gathered there stood with lifted arms, with faces turned up. Now and then when a form stirred Northrup could see that it was a stagger of drunkenness, could guess that the stuff which they had been drinking was the terribly intoxicating juice of the agave, which, fermented in rawhide bags, puts frenzy into men.

Suddenly through the silence floated Yahoya's voice, singing softly. She was chanting the sacred song, the song which people said she was singing when she appeared before Inaa out of the night. She gave the words strange little twists of mispronunciation—but the words were *English!* There was no doubting that they were English, or rather that they had been English when Yahoya's baby voice had sung them for the first time into Inaa's ears.

It struck Northrup as an odd little thing that this song alone should have remained to the girl of the tongue which had been her mother's, this song which she could not understand, but whose sounds had been kept fresh through frequent repetition.

And, somehow, the whole thing struck him as more pitiful than amusing, although both elements mixed into it. Here was Yahoya, who had called him liar for saying she was no true goddess, singing in all seriousness her sacred song; down there, far below, was a tribe of Indians listening to her sacred song with a sort of reverence. And the song itself was a nursery jingle!

Buzzfuzz was a jolly fly,
  Very blithe and gay!
He began his lively dance
  With the break of day.
Up and down the window-pane
  With a dainty tread,
Sometimes on his tiptoes slides,
  Sometimes on his head!

Northrup caught a grin on Strang's face and could have kicked him for it. In his own eyes he felt a sting of salt mist. He no longer had a desire to laugh at Yahoya or at the face-lifted crowd below. He no longer felt resentment toward the girl. He did feel a quick impulse to sweep her up into his arms, to hold her tightly, as one might hold a very little, motherless child; to carry her away from here and make life over for her.

THE song died away and the stillness of the Festival of Silence went with it. A thunder of voices crashed through the night. Wild yells, until now pent up in riotous breasts, broke out everywhere. And though the voices seemed crying all things in the world, from everywhere rose the shout:

"Yahoya! Yahoya! Yahoya!"

Down yonder the forms were circling drunkenly now—men, women and children stopping only that they might drink, reeling more and more, shouting, lifting their voices in shrill, finely drawn notes, like the yapping of a thousand coyotes.

But from the seething mess came out several forms, walking swiftly and straight. From here there was no need to look twice to see that it was the old priest, Inaa, who led them. Close behind him came Tiyo and after him a score of young men, all armed as were the followers of Strang. They were now coming up the steps. Northrup looked quickly to see what Strang was doing.

He had gathered about him the half-dozen men who had come with him and was giving sharp orders. Northrup marveled a little to see them, one after the other, withdraw until they had lost themselves in the shadows under the overhanging cliffs.

"If he means business," wondered Northrup, "why doesn't he make the fight as they come up the cliffs? The way Tiyo went for him? Or has his nerve left him, after all?"

Now, standing upon the cliff's edge where all above and below might see them, were three forms, that of a white-clad maiden, her face radiant, a strange brightness in her eyes, the form of Strang close to her at her left, Northrup upon her right, a dozen steps away. Then there was old Inaa, standing between Northrup and Yahoya, then Tiyo a little back, his eyes like hard, cold stones upon Strang. The others who had followed until now remained a score of steps from the precipice where they were not to be seen from below.

"Now the show-down," grunted Northrup to himself. "It's Strang against Tiyo. Who wins?"

Inaa slowly lifted his hand. The shouting ceased below; again the leaping forms grew still save for a little swaying. It seemed to Northrup, however, that they were vaguely restless, eager for the happening of something at which he could only guess. Was it merely the marriage ceremony? Or were there many men down there waiting a signal to take sides, some with Strang, some with Inaa and Tiyo?

"Look, People of the Hidden Spring!" cried Inaa suddenly, his voice floating out wildly, his two arms wide-flung. "See how Inaa has kept you from under the heel of the world of Bahanas! How many have come here in the memory of grown men? Two—no more. How many have gone away again, to tell of what they have seen here? None! Has not Inaa guarded you well? Look before the light comes; see where, across the desert, the eyes of Inaa are watching!"

Then Northrup, looking out the way the old man pointed across the wide sweep of desert to the south, saw a great pillar of flame standing red against the pale sky. It shot upward from the distant mountain-peaks, and he knew that at the least those peaks were fifty miles away!

He looked to the eastward and saw again a pillar of red fire lapping at the skies and knew that it was little closer than the first. He looked to the west and saw the third. And suddenly, as he remembered the old Indian woman who had kept him alive, he thought that there was less madness than sanity in the things she had told him.

Was she one of the outposts of this strange people, after all? Had her fires shot their swift messages here that Inaa might know if all were well? Had the blaze his own hands had kindled before her dying eyes spoken to Inaa, too? Were there seven cities of Chebo, as she had told; was this people but the first of them? Had the old Spanish adventurers but told the truth after all of the wonderful cities of Cibola; and had they remained all these years hidden from the white man? He felt his blood tingling through him.

He looked to the north. Here the cliffs stood up so that one might not look far out as in the other directions. But here, clearly outlined against the sky, was the form of a man. And the man was shouting, his voice coming down clearly:

"In the north all is well, Father! The fire burns red!"

Again the people below shouted, crying:

"The red fires burn! It is well!"

And again they fell silent abruptly.

"Inaa has guarded his children well," went on the priest solemnly. "For fifty years has he not been *Inguu* and *Inaa* (mother and father) to you? Because the gods were pleased did they not send one of their kind, the Goddess Yahoya, to live with you? Did they not send the Bahana whom you call the Man of Wisdom to cure the sick and teach you how to make better things from gold—beautiful things for you to wear, cups from which to drink? And has not Inaa kept the Bahana here so that he might not go out to tell of what he has seen and so bring the cursed white men here, as they have gone everywhere else over the world?"

A moment he was silent. Then, his voice lowered a little, he continued:

"Inaa is old, his years weigh him down. Yahoya this night, her heart opened to the future, has said that already is the Skeleton House made ready for the coming of Inaa. But he does not go and leave his people without a thought for their welfare. He leaves behind him one to step into his place, the biggest man among you, the mightiest with his hands, the swiftest runner across the desert, the most tireless, Tiyo, the head captain of your young men!"

A great shout swept up from below:

"Tiyo! Tiyo! Tiyo!"

And then, as silence was settling, a loud voice boomed out:

"Tiyo for our Head Man; Yahoya for our Goddess! Tiyo and Yahoya!" And again many voices arose crying, "Tiyo and Yahoya!"

Tiyo himself, at a sharp glance from the old man, came forward another step, swiftly, standing very close to Yahoya, so close that her gown brushed him. The cheering rose more windily from below. Strang's eyes and Tiyo's met then. To Northrup it was a sheer wonder that the two men could hold themselves back from flying at each other's throats.

While they shouted down there Inaa was speaking swiftly with Yahoya. Northrup could not catch the words, but words were not needed now to tell what Inaa was saying. He was commanding, urging, threatening. And when Yahoya answered, it seemed that she had given him an answer that pleased him.

"Listen, my children," cried Inaa, his voice ringing with the triumph in it. "The White Goddess is pleased with you this dawning. Her heart is yours. It is not her wish to journey back up through the skies down which she came; it is not her wish to move on down into the underworld where the abode of the gods is. She will linger here with you, she will wed Tiyo and you shall be their children, blessed of the gods!"

Northrup could see that Yahoya was smiling. She leaned out over the abyss until he was afraid for her, thinking that madness had come upon her and that she was going to fall. She lifted her hand and there fell the great silence again, seeming now more breathless than ever. And then, when everything was still, when they waited and wondered why she did not speak, suddenly she broke the silence. And not with a spoken word, but with a clear burst of laughter leaping out over them from her red lips.

Inaa frowned and plucked at his beard; Tiyo shifted his feet, looking uncertainly from his father to Yahoya; Strang stared at her much as Northrup was staring. And still, until she had done, Yahoya gave free vent to her tinkling laughter.

"You have heard Inaa," she cried at last, her voice clear and steady, confident and imperious. "Now hear Yahoya! Do I look to you like one afraid? Do I tremble as if with fear? Does my body shake as men's bodies do when they look on death? And yet have I been threatened tonight! *Aliksai.* Listen.

"It is the dawning and Yahoya, the Goddess, has said that she would wed. Whom would you have her take for husband, my People of the Hidden Spring? Shall it be Tiyo here? He is hungry for me; he is shaking with the desire for me; Inaa bids me marry him! Shall it be the Man of Wisdom? He is covetous of beautiful things and he wants Yahoya! His eyes burn me with the greed in them. Shall I take him for husband?

"Are you not my people, O People of the Hidden Spring? Shall not your wish enter the heart of the White Goddess? Cry out in a loud voice and say whom shall Yahoya wed?"

Northrup moved closer without knowing that he did so, thrilled with the girl's fearlessness. He had heard her words to Strang, he had seen her seem to agree with Inaa. What was she going to do?

She herself had given the sign for division. In the shouting which answered her there were many voices clamoring for Tiyo, many for Strang. And as by magic the throng about the fires was shaken into its two factions, women drawing back, men grouping here and yonder about their leaders.

"Wait!" Yahoya's clear young voice cut through the din like a bell through a roll of thunder. "Wait and listen! The Man of Wisdom has said to me: 'Will you wed me?' And Yahoya, the Goddess, promised! Inaa has said to me, 'Will you wed Tiyo my son?' And Yahoya told him, 'I have promised and a goddess may not break her word!' What is the answer, my people?"

Only a murmur crept up to her in answer. Men looked at her wonderingly, waiting and listening as she had commanded. And again she laughed.

"Yahoya will tell you," she cried lightly, her rising voice seeming to soar upward upon wings of happiness. "Yahoya, the goddess, may not lie. But what maiden among you would not lie for her lover? Yahoya, who is no goddess but a white maid, will not wed with Tiyo. And she will not wed with Strang, who is a coward. She chooses her own lover, and if it be death—why then, she chooses death with him."

Like a flash she had fled along the cliff-edge, sweeping by Tiyo, avoiding Inaa's clutching fingers. She had sped to Northrup's side and her arms flashed upward and about his shoulders.

"Save me from them, Saxnorthrup!" she whispered. "I am only a maid—and I am afraid!"

As Northrup stared down at the face at his breast, he felt the wild flutter of her heart against him and heard her whispering:

"Of you only am I not afraid—because I love you, Saxnorthrup!"

XII

ONLY a little while ago Northrup himself had said: "Love does not come like this, in a hurry!" And now he knew in a flash that then he had known nothing of it: that love comes as it wills, without man's bidding or consent. And, madness though it might be, it had come to him.

As his arms shut about her, hurting her in that first embrace, his heart was beating as wildly as hers. He wanted her; she belonged to him; and he was going to have her!

He wanted to get her away from here and to make her happy; he wanted to show her a world which would be like fairyland to her; he wanted to teach her his language, her own forgotten tongue; he wanted to mother her and father her and lover her. She was at once to him both an incomparable maiden and a little, frightened, hunted wild thing.

But while something deep within him, until now unawakened, talked to his soul of these things, his eyes and brain were keenly alive to what lay about him. The thing which he read in Strang's eyes was little different from the thing he saw in the eyes of Tiyo and Inaa. Amazement first, then incredulity which was still half stupefaction, then baffled rage and open threat.

Northrup's thought just then was that it was going to end with him and Yahoya going over the cliff together. And yet, in that first wild moment, it was only elation which beat through his heart. She lifted her head a little, looking straight up into his eyes. And there before them all, not to be robbed of what life seemed to be bringing them at its close, he kissed her.

"You love me, Saxnorthrup?" the girl whispered.

"I love you, Yahoya," he told her.

It was Inaa who took the first step forward. Yahoya, seeing him coming, slipped quickly from Northrup's arms. She alone had been in a position to plan for all things since she alone knew what Yahoya was going to do. She cried out clearly, sending her voice downward, calling:

"Will you hear Yahoya speak, my people? Will you bid Inaa stand back while Yahoya speaks?"

There came quick answer to her, many voices shouting:

"Yahoya! Listen to Yahoya!"

Down below, the two distinct factions now stood fully separated, grouped upon opposite sides of the fires. Clearly they were nearly equal in numbers; clearly then half of the men down there hungered to see Inaa and Tiyo fail in their wishes; while the other half clung to the old order and stood ready to oppose Strang's party in all things.

"There is our one chance," muttered Northrup, ready for whatever might happen; and he waited anxiously for Yahoya to speak.

Inaa, too, waited, and Tiyo and Strang, each for the moment uncertain. Yahoya, with a swift glance at them, turned again toward the expectant tribe.

"Among you," she cried, "are many young men and maidens. What man of you will stand aside and see another take his *mana?* What maiden of you will let Inaa or another tell her which lover she must love? You can look into Yahoya's heart and into Yellow Beard's heart and understand!

"But listen further! Many of you, drawn off there against the cliffs, have your hearts filled with hatred of Inaa and Tiyo! Over there stand you others, and your hearts are filled with hatred of the Man of Wisdom. Across the space between you your eyes run like the eyes of wolves hungering.

"The People of the Hidden Spring love their cornfields and their homes and their quiet lives of security. And yet, even now, they are about to spring upon one another to send many souls down to the Skeleton House, to tear themselves in two. Is it wise? Or has magic fallen upon you? Magic from the Man of Wisdom or from Inaa himself?

"If I wed Tiyo there will be war. If I wed the Man of Wisdom there will be war. What say you, my people, if Yahoya weds neither of them, but the man of her own choice, the great Yellow Beard? Then tonight you will not spill your blood and your brother's, but instead you will drink deep, feast full and sleep in peace! Now you can command Inaa to wed me to Yellow Beard and so, those of you who hate Tiyo can laugh at him; those of you who hate the Man of Wisdom can laugh at him!

"*Aliksai!* Listen. One way you shall have Yahoya's death and Yellow Beard's, for they will go down over the cliffs together; you will have Inaa's death and Tiyo's and Strang's and Muyingwa's, and the deaths of many young men, the strongest in the tribe, for they will fall! Another way and you will have peace. And tomorrow you can have your election if you like, keeping Inaa where he is or putting another in his place. What say you, my people?"

She drew back a little, not so far as to be lost from their sight, just so that she could stretch out her hand and slip it into Northrup's. Inaa began shouting; Tiyo's voice joined his angrily; Strang, stepping forward, called with them. And from below, out of a little silence, came a great shout of laughter!

"Let us drink, brothers!" cried a loud voice. "We were bewitched. The maid is right. Why should we fight when it is easier to drink and eat, to dance and sleep? Inaa had promised us a wedding; let him marry the maid to Yellow Beard!"

Now many shouted one thing, many another. But again and again a grumble of dissatisfaction was drowned in a shout of laughter. In the main the faction hating Tiyo was satisfied to see him thrust aside for another; those hating Strang were satisfied in his discomfiture.

The Hopi are at heart peace-loving people; a dance and a feast appeal to them far more than an orgy of blood. Here was at once a compromise and a huge joke on their head men. And perhaps many lovers below felt their rude sympathy for the lovers above.

Tiyo's twenty men, drawing closer now, looked at one another a trifle uncertainly. They began speaking in low tones and Northrup heard one of them laugh. The half-dozen men Strang had left in the shadows had been joined secretly by several others; they too had drawn closer and were speaking among themselves.

Looking to them Northrup saw a quick figure flit out of Yahoya's stone building and run toward them. It was the girl, Nayangap. She went hastily to the side of the young man, Muyingwa, and began speaking to him earnestly. And Muyingwa, nodding, came on until he stood close to Yahoya's side. Strang stared at him anxiously.

"*Aliksai*. Listen!" he cried loudly, until the din below grew still. "It is I, Muyingwa, who speak. Inaa has said that it is Tiyo who is the strongest of us, the swiftest runner. He lies! Even now will I run out across the desert with Tiyo, as many miles as he will and come back ahead of him! The men who are my men know this and have no love for liars! So they would not see Yahoya wedded to one of them. But with Yellow Beard it is different. Let Inaa wed them and we shall throw down our arms and feast. Then I will race with Tiyo, and the man who is strongest and swiftest will be your head captain. Then you will vote for Inaa or the other as your head priest. What say you? Is not Yahoya right? What man of us loves Tiyo or the Man of Wisdom better than his own life?"

While those bent upon strife murmured everywhere, those who had gone into the division half-heartedly or not at all, outnumbered them many to one. When, after that, Inaa sought to make himself heard, no one would listen; when Tiyo shouted, his words were lost to the ears of those standing close to him; when Strang shot out a sharp word and an evil glance at Muyingwa, it was met with a hard stare. Muyingwa had gone back to his *mana*, and the two of them were standing like Northrup and Yahoya, hand in hand.

It was perhaps Muyingwa's offer to race with Tiyo as much as anything which settled the matter. There are no runners in the world like the runners of the southwestern desert; they are men who can run an unbelievable number of miles out across blazing sands in the morning to dig in their fields and run back the same evening. With them running is at once a necessary thing, a part of their religious training, and a way of settling just such debates as the one that had arisen now.

They began sweeping up along the steep steps now, the men of the two factions mingling, jostling one another, each eager to be the first to come to the top. Northrup pressed Yahoya's hand mightily.

"You are a God-blessed wonder, Yahoya," he whispered. "We are going to pull through."

"You hurt my hand, Saxnorthrup!" she smiled up at him. "But—do it again!"

SOON they were in the center of a great ring, they with Inaa, Strang and Tiyo. Men were laughing openly everywhere. And their eyes, when they had finished with Yahoya and Northrup, had already measured Tiyo and were seeking to measure Muyingwa that they might lay their wagers upon the endurance run.

A man is not head priest of such a people as this for fifty years without learning something. There was not a cooler, craftier mind among them than Inaa's. He knew full well that in time of storm the reed that bends is better off than the stubborn tree. He frowned warningly at Tiyo, then, making his face over into its habitual mask, turned to Yahoya.

"Yahoya has been pleased," he said steadily, "to test her people. She has declared herself no true goddess but a mere maid to see if in our hearts' fear of the goddess were greater than love of Yahoya! Her will is the will of her people. The dawn has come and a wedding is promised. Let Yahoya and the great Bahana come forward."

Northrup, looking down quickly at Yahoya saw that her dimples had come back, that her eyes were shining softly, that a happy flush had run up into her cheeks. What wonderful thing was this? Had it been just a few hours since he had come here, dying of thirst? Or had it been years? Was he, Sax Northrup, about to be joined to this radiant girl in matrimony, none the less holy to him because of the heathen rites with which it was to be celebrated? Or was he dreaming the whole mad thing?

Slowly, his hand holding hers, he and Yahoya stepped forward. And then a sudden dread came upon him. If it had come to open fight it would have been one thing, a thing Northrup knew. But now that no knife-blade caught the early light he knew that none the less there were knives hungering for him, perhaps for Yahoya. He felt that all about him was menace, the more terrible because it was glossed over with smiles—a concealed, masked danger.

But these things he promptly forgot. Inaa, fighting hard for the mastery of himself, and getting it wonderfully, gave the people what they demanded, a wedding. Northrup, looking down at Yahoya's upturned face, saw a great, unfeigned gladness there. Her lips moved silently with Inaa's, as if she knew each word of the ceremony and were saying it within her heart.

Northrup did not know if he were doing a good or a bad thing in letting this go on; he only knew that he loved Yahoya and that she thought that she loved him. And there was no time for thought. Already he heard Inaa's words, saw Yahoya forming them silently.

"The Spider Woman and the Great Earth Woman, the goddess who weaves the colors of sunrise and sunset, the goddess to whom belongs the world, the god who makes green things grow and the God of Rain, the great gods and the small gods bless you, Yahoya and Yellow Beard! You are a *mana* and his woman. The woman's house is open to the man, to none but him. It is done!"

And between two long lines, instantly formed, of shouting, laughing men, Sax Northrup and his wife, given to him by her own will and by the head priest of the People of the Hidden Spring, passed into the stone house.

XIII

"WE ARE married, Saxnorthrup! Is it not nice to be married to Yahoya?"

She came into his arms like a bird to its nest, fluttering a little, eager to be there.

"You are my man!" she whispered. "And I am your *mana!* Oh, but I am proud of you, Saxnorthrup! There is no other man like you in the world! Did I not see you lift up Tiyo and cast him down so that his bones ached? Did I not see you strike Eddie mightily so that he reeled back afraid? I am glad you are no god, but a man, Saxnorthrup. Glad that I am no goddess, but a maid to love as other maids love—but harder!"

Outside, the last of the procession had passed by, the shouting forms had gone down the stairway; men were forgetting them in their eagerness for a test of strength and speed between Tiyo and Muyingwa.

Northrup drew the girl tenderly to him, a little sense of awe upon him now that they were alone together, a little sense of pity for her, a feeling that though Inaa had given her to him, and the tribe had cheered, all was not well. They were forgotten for the moment. But Northrup had not missed the look in Strang's eyes, in Inaa's, in Tiyo's, as they had passed the open door and gone on.

"Yahoya," he said gently, "I love you. Things have a way of happening which I had not expected. I didn't know just what love was, and now I know. I didn't believe in it overmuch, I suppose; and now I know that there is nothing else in the world this morning that counts. If a man looks at you I want to murder him. I am going to try to take you away with me, Yahoya, where you will see other men, better men to look upon than I am. I am going to play square, if I can. And if you find you don't love me after all, that you do love some other man, then——"

"Then, Saxnorthrup?" she asked softly.

"I think I'd kill the brute!" said Northrup savagely.

Whereupon Yahoya was vastly delighted.

"You do love me," she told him sagely. "For I feel like that! And," eagerly, "you'll take me into the world of the Bahanas? So that I shall see the wagons running uphill without horses? And great houses that float on the water? And many, many wonderful things?"

Could he do these things? Could he one day take Yahoya to her first opera? Could he take her to marvel at the great spectacular shows of the great cities? Could he be the first to initiate her into a life which would be a veritable wonderland to her?

Had his destiny saved this one glorious thing for him to do? Would ever any one in all the world have been so equipped as was Yahoya for enjoyment, for marveling from day to day, from night to night?

He could imagine her little cry of ecstasy when they drove down Broadway the first night, when she saw the lights, the many-colored electric displays above. To her it would be magic. The train upon which they traveled, the women's gowns, the porters in their uniforms, books and pictures and music; dainty things to eat—why, an ice-cream would be a thing of wonder to her. Could he, Sax Northrup, take this maid by the hand and lead her out into the new world?

He remembered Strang's look, Tiyo's and Inaa's, and his brows contracted. Yahoya looked at him wonderingly.

"What is it, Saxnorthrup?" she asked uncertainly. "I have displeased you?"

He laughed at her, drew her even closer to him, kissing the alarmed look out of her eyes.

"I was just thinking, my little wild girl," he told her gaily. "Thinking makes a man's face look like that. I won't do it any more."

So much, loverwise. Then, man-like, he began thinking seriously again. Here was the situation:

He had come here, led by the lure of gold. If he got out at all it seemed that he would go as empty-pocketed as he had come. He thought disparagingly of the thousand dollars he had outside in a bank. He didn't know much about the cost of women's garments, but he had the hazy idea that the sort of gown he wanted Yahoya to wear would cost the greater part of his thousand. And then, how was he going to take her everywhere in the world, give her everything she would be sure to want? She'd be asking for a hundred things every minute at first.

So much for the money end of it. There was still left the greater question—

"Can we get out at all?"

It was almost as if she had read some of his thoughts. She had slipped away from him, running to the door of one of the anterooms. Holding aside the curtain there, she said happily,

"This is Yahoya's sleeping-room. Will you see how pretty it is, Saxnorthrup? And the pretty things her people gave her as gifts to the goddess?"

He hesitated at the door a moment, uncertain if he should profane it with his presence. It drew from him a little gasp of admiration and amazement.

There was a couch made cozy with the skins thrown over it. A table, cunningly made of wood so precious here, stood out in the center of the little room, a square of snow-white buckskin thrown over it. Upon the table was a vase with pale-blue flowers. And the vase itself was of solid gold, skilfully hammered.

Upon the floor, arranged about the walls, were countless cups and vases, tiny jugs, belts, forehead bands, moccasin ornaments, jeweled bracelets—all of solid gold, many set with flawless turquoises.

"All presents to Yahoya," she smiled at him. "You see, Saxnorthrup, Yahoya was a goddess and a great lady before she gave herself away to you! And presently, after Tiyo and Muyingwa race, there will be more presents. For me, the bride, and for you, the bridegroom, Saxnorthrup."

She made herself comfortable upon one end of her couch, drew up her feet under her, gathered her knees into her arms and dimpled over them at Northrup.

"No wonder Strang counts himself a millionaire," thought Northrup. "And small chance that he will let us get away if he knows the way to stop us."

And to Yahoya he said slowly:

"Do you know—Mrs. Sax Northrup—" she laughed delightedly and blushed becomingly at the new name which she interrupted him by saying over softly to herself —"you are a disgracefully rich young woman?"

"Oh," she laughed, "this is nothing! In each of the Seven Cities Yahoya has a house——"

"Seven Cities!" broke in Northrup quickly. "What Seven Cities, Yahoya?"

She lifted her brows at him in surprise.

"You do not know then? This is but one of the Seven Cities of Chebo, the smallest, where Yahoya has come but seldom for the Festival of Silence. The others have many people and big houses in the cliffs, with wide stairways up and down, and hundreds of rooms. And in each is a great house with five, six, nine rooms, all belonging to Yahoya. Here I bring but two maids; there I have many to dress my hair, to bathe me, to do little things for me that I do not wish to do. There I have many golden things: a table all of gold, with many turquoises; a little bed with golden feet; white furs to walk on; a chair to ride in, heavy with gold, that strong men carry. You shall see, Saxnorthrup! And you shall know that Yahoya does not come to her lover with empty hands!"

Nayangap and Tocha came in to serve them a breakfast of milk and little corn-meal cakes in Yahoya's room, and until they had gone, taking their trays away with them, Northrup listened eagerly to what Yahoya had to tell him. And, in brief, this is what he learned:

The Seven Cities of Chebo controlled a district, perhaps two hundred miles across. There were rich valleys, hidden in the mountains, where they grew their melons and corn and cotton. There were mines from which they took vast quantities of gold and silver, fashioning ornaments and table service for the rich.

A young man was overlord of the Seven Cities, having been elected to hold office for life. He had turned his eyes upon Yahoya, but since he had already two wives, the priests, very powerful throughout the district, had forbidden him wedding her.

In order that white men might not come into a country which nature had so cunningly hidden from them, there were stationed out through the desert, upon any of the water-trails, sentinels who signaled by fire or smoke when a man came into sight. Generally these were the older folk, men and women, useless to the state for other purposes, who believed that thus they would be pleasing their gods, and who considered it a high honor to be chosen for so responsible a task.

So if a white man had turned toward the Seven Cities, he might not come within fifty miles of the nearest of them when he was met by runners sent out to intercept him. A friendly greeting, a sharp knife from the back, and one more name stricken from the list of adventurers. Or, if men were needed in the mines, a living death. Besides the outposts, there were lookouts upon the cliff-tops, alert, keen-eyed men, who did not miss the slinking form of a gray coyote upon the gray sands.

Northrup thought swiftly of the sandstorm, of his lying so long blotted out from sight against the drifting sand; of how when he had at last come on, it was night, and the lookouts had perhaps come down to take part in the Festival of Silence.

"If you did not know of the Seven Cities," Yahoya asked him, "how is it that you came journeying this way, Saxnorthrup?"

He began telling her of the Indian in Santa Fé, only to be interrupted by Yahoya saying quickly—

"You were with Eddie then, when the runner died?"

"Yes. Strang has told you about that?"

"No," she answered. "He always lied to me, not knowing that I knew he lied. He said that in his heart he dreamed a dream of me, and that that brought him across the sands, hurrying!"

Northrup grunted. Then, moved to curiosity he demanded—

"If Strang didn't tell you of it, how do you know?"

"Tiyo told me," she answered, puzzling him still more.

"Tiyo? Who told Tiyo?"

"He was there. It was Tiyo who shot the poisoned arrow in at the window."

"Tiyo went way down to Santa Fé, killed his man, and came back here?"

She nodded.

"The other was Chiwakala, son of the old man that Strang would make head priest in the place of Inaa. Chiwakala was a friend of Kish-taka, the Hawk Man, who is overlord of the Seven Cities, and not without power himself. Between him and Tiyo there has always been rivalry and hatred. Kish-taka sought to make him head captain of the youths of the Hidden Spring. But even Kish-taka's power was less in this matter than Inaa's, and so Tiyo was elected.

"Chiwakala was bad in his heart, *nukpana*. People said he was a *Powaka*, who casts evil and sickness into men. It was Tiyo's doing that Chiwakala was condemned to spend all his life down in a mine where bad men and women are put, and those that Kish-taka or the priests do not like. Then Chiwakala, who was a great runner like Tiyo and Muyingwa, fled, having in his heart to go out among the Bahana and, because he hated Tiyo and others, to send certain of the Bahanas into our land, telling them of riches to be had.

"Chiwakala went swiftly, but Tiyo went after him, also swiftly. Chiwakala, coming first among the Bahanas, had told his story, and men laughed at him, calling him liar. Then, in Santa Fé, he was to tell a man who is known among the Bahanas as a hardy adventurer. There Tiyo came up with him, and, shooting quickly through the open window a little blue-winged arrow with poison tip, killed him. Then Tiyo came back, and even Kish-taka, who had befriended Chiwakala, said that he had been *nukpana*, and that Tiyo had done well for the people of the Seven Cities."

From Santa Fé, Northrup estimated roughly that he had traversed some four hundred miles in coming here. A round trip of eight hundred miles! And yet Yahoya spoke of the matter lightly, as if Tiyo had run but a little way.

"How long was Tiyo gone?" he asked curiously.

"From the moonrise when he departed until the dawning when he dropped down before me," she answered, "twenty days had passed!"

"Twenty days!" gasped Northrup.

"Oh," she said quickly, misunderstanding his thought, "it was because he lost time in seeking out Chiwakala among the white men. Tiyo would have come back sooner but for that."

Eight hundred miles in twenty days! And Yahoya was apologizing for Tiyo's slowness! A clip of over forty miles a day, day in and day out, over such country as Northrup knew stretched between these people and Santa Fé! It was incredible—and yet it was the sober truth. For here are a people not like other men, a people with a strange, seemingly tireless power and swiftness, that is the result of desert training, inheritance, evolution, all aided by the religious ceremonies calling for an abnormally developed physique. The desert had made creatures like the coyote, the snake, the jackrabbit that knew how to live a very long time without water. The desert had made its own plant life to exist and flourish where water was not. The desert had made its men.

Even now that a great issue held in balance, that issue was to be decided by such a race as perhaps no white man had ever seen. Tiyo and Muyingwa, down in the cañon were ready.

"Shall we go out upon the cliff edge and watch them?" said Northrup. "I think that very much depends on this race—for you and me, Yahoya!"

XIV

TIYO and Muyingwa showed an equal eagerness to be off. They stood side by side, stripped, the sun already beating hot upon their naked bodies. As he looked down, Northrup marveled how the desert had made her children into what they must be to wrest nourishment and draw life from her barren breasts.

The men were alike, as he looked upon them from the back. Their shoulders were not wide, though they were tall men, both of them. Their bodies were slender, almost reed-like in smooth symmetry and pliant toughness. There was no hint of a useless ounce of flesh, nothing but hard muscle.

But while bigness of body was nowhere evident in the torsos, which were none the less magnificent, the hips were thicker than the hips of white men, the thighs bulged out with endurance in every knotted sinew; the calves were the swelling, powerful calves of Marathon men.

The desert Indian in his heart is a born gambler, his love for hazard no whit less than the Mongolian's. Already were the onlookers caught in a fever of excitement as they cried out for their favorites and eagerly sought takers for their wagers. From the voices coming up to him Northrup knew that one man was seeking to bet his whole year's yield of corn that Tiyo would come in the victor; that another staked many gold cups on Muyingwa; that even the women were wagering personal ornaments.

"Where will they run?" he asked of Yahoya.

"Yonder," she pointed, "to the foot of that peak, without water on the way. There grow red flowers that are found nowhere else. The one who brings the first flower back wins. It is the custom."

Northrup judged that to the base of the cliff it was at the least fifteen miles. A race of thirty miles through the hot sun, and without water!

"Who will win?"

She shook her head thoughtfully.

"It lies with the gods, Saxnorthrup. There are in the world no two runners like them since Chiwakala is dead. No man could beat them—except you, Saxnorthrup!" she ended loyally.

"Good Lord!" grunted Northrup. "I'd shrivel up in about ten minutes!" But he spoke in English.

Inaa made his way through the throng which drew back for him. From a cup in his hand he sprinkled water upon both men.

"The gods watch you, my sons," he said loudly. "Run!"

They broke away from the throng which watched them silently and went down the gentle slope from the cañon mouth at a trot, their elbows rubbing. Northrup noted how Tiyo held his arms drawn up a little so that the relaxed hands were close to his stomach; how Muyingwa ran with his arms at his sides, the hands dangling.

And in their action he saw no other difference. There was the same free stride, the same way of bending the body slightly forward with the head held up a little, the same easy play of muscles and rhythmic swing.

"If I had to bet on either of them," was his thought, "I'd toss a coin for it."

And then, mindful of what the result of the race might mean to Yahoya and to him, he cried sharply:

"Go to it, Muyingwa! I'm backing you!"

Like two great, gaunt greyhounds, Tiyo and Muyingwa were already slipping out into the desert, their bare feet seeming scarcely to touch the loose sand. Each had hit his stride, and Northrup saw that now Muyingwa was setting the pace, forging a step ahead, and that Tiyo seemed quite content to drop the step behind. He frowned as he asked of Yahoya—

"Which man has won the most races in his life?"

And she answered—

"Tiyo."

Steadily, each keeping to his stride, the two passed out into the gray expanse, Muyingwa increasing the distance lying between him and his rival, Tiyo never seeming to see Muyingwa. Now, more than ever before, did the desert seem like a mighty ocean, with these men, two bold swimmers, striking straight out into it, and the thought must arise in the mind of a white man who watched them: "Is their strength so mighty a thing that it will not forsake them before they can get back?"

But they would be back soon enough, and then there would be a settling of scores.

Northrup drew his eyes away from the two forms growing smaller in the distance, beginning to blend into the monotone of desert, and stared down at the throng below him. He found Strang in a center of a group of silent, attentive men. Beyond him was Inaa, the priest, also with his group around him.

"They are like a crowd of schoolboys," thought Northrup. "Ready to break off in the middle of a fight to watch a race; ready to get into mischief again the next minute."

"Yahoya," he said gently, "do you know what it will mean for us if Tiyo wins this race?"

"Yes." She spoke quite steadily, slipping her hand into his, and smiling a little. "But we are not afraid to die, you and I, Saxnorthrup."

"So it would be death then?"

"For you," she told him, "it would be a laborer's work down in the mines. For me it would mean bride to Tiyo, or my own knife in my heart. We would not wait, Saxnorthrup, you and I."

"What would we do?" he asked curiously, wondering at the girl's calmness.

"When we saw Tiyo running home before Muyingwa we would leap out to meet him, Saxnorthrup. Hand in hand, as lovers should."

"You love me like that, Yahoya?"

She pressed his hand hard in her own.

"That is the only way Yahoya knows how to love, my husband. But I am praying to Haruing Wuhti and Kokang Wuhti that it may be Muyingwa who races home first."

"In either case there is going to be trouble," he said thoughtfully. "Those men down there are not to be cheated of their fight. While they are watching the race, should we try to leave by the way which I came?"

"Where you go I go with you," she answered. "But if they wished they could come up with us out in the desert, and there are no cliffs out there for us to leap from, Saxnorthrup."

MEN were already coming up from the cañon, seeking the heights from which they might watch the race until Tiyo and Muyingwa were lost to even their piercing eyes. In a little the level space would be crowded.

"Let us go back into the house, Yahoya," suggested Northrup. "There we can be alone for a little. And there we can have certain men come presently whom we shall want to talk with."

Before they could gain the wide doorway Northrup saw many hard, frowning eyes turned upon him, and knew that a little while ago these same eyes had looked on laughingly at his wedding with Yahoya. The Indians had enjoyed the moment, had found perhaps a pleasure in piquing at once Strang and Tiyo and Inaa, had yielded to the impulse of the moment and Yahoya's influence over them. But now stood out their eternal hatred of a white man.

Quickly the level space about the pool and the spires of rock uplifted into the air were covered with men seeking to find the two little moving dots in the wide sweep of sand. Early among them came the girl, Nayangap. With no glance at Northrup now, stooping swiftly, she caught up the hem of Yahoya's gown and lifted it to her lips.

"Yahoya," she said softly, her voice troubled, as were her eyes, "goddess or maid, it is all the same to the heart of Nayangap. In her heart Nayangap loves you and worships."

"You are a good girl," said Yahoya, with a little touch of her old air of a young queen. "Look. I give you this."

She caught up one of the many jeweled cups from the floor. Nayangap shook her head, saying quickly:

"Nayangap does not come for presents. She brings you word from Muyingwa."

Northrup looked at the girl eagerly. For the first time now, Nayangap looked at him. And it was to him rather than to Yahoya that she spoke.

"Muyingwa will win the race, because he is the better man, and because the gods love him best! Then his followers—and they are many—will name him head captain of the young men, in Tiyo's place. Then, too, the good men who are fair in their hearts will name him head captain because they have said the man who wins will be their chief. But there are others and they are many, too, who are *nukpana*. They will break their promises as if they were the shells of humming-birds' eggs. Then, because Muyingwa is no coward, there may be a great spilling of blood."

"Go on," said Northrup impatiently, seeing that the girl was stopping.

Her eyes had been very hard. Now, suddenly, they grew soft, and into her dusky cheeks a tide of red surged up.

"Muyingwa loves power and gold!" she cried passionately. "Muyingwa loves to strive with other men. But most of all Muyingwa loves a *mana*, and that *mana* is Nayangap! His heart sings like a thrush and makes music in Nayangap's heart when he comes to her.

"Nayangap loves gold, too, and she loves power for Muyingwa, and pretty gowns for herself. But most of all she loves Muyingwa's self. And after Muyingwa she loves Yahoya! This Muyingwa knows. His heart is big; he would give to his *mana* all things. So he has called me aside before the race and told me what I must do for Yahoya's sake."

"If Yahoya were in truth goddess," cried Yahoya, her eyes bright, "she would make Muyingwa this day overlord of all the Seven Cities! Since she is but a maid like you, Nayangap, she prays to the gods for him."

"This is the word of Muyingwa," went on Nayangap swiftly. "There will be a great struggle and many men will go down to Maski. But Muyingwa will win because he will have the stronger party, and because the gods are with him. He has no love for the Man of Wisdom, who has tricked him, saying that Yahoya would be left free to do what she wished.

"Muyingwa says that if the fight comes Yahoya is to stay in her *kiva*, where harm can not come to her; and that her lover, Yellow Beard, shall come out to stand at Muyingwa's right hand and fight the fight with him."

"*Askwali.* I thank you," said Yahoya gently. "You will bring us water and food, Nayangap. Yellow Beard shall rest here and sleep, so that when the time comes he shall fight a man's fight. That is best."

Nayangap withdrew upon her errand, going swiftly. Yahoya came to Northrup, then, putting up her arms, looking up into his face:

"My man," she said softly. "Kiss me!' And when he had kissed her: "I love you. I am proud of you. You are such a man as never before came into the world. If you fall to-day I shall run out and throw myself upon your body and die with you. If you live I shall live always with you in paradise. Kiss me again. And now sleep, Saxnorthrup."

The wonder is that Northrup did sleep. He awoke from a dream of sitting in a box at the theater with Yahoya, watching her while she watched the actors. Yahoya was bending over him, her hand laid lightly upon his shoulder.

"The lookout has called out that he can see them returning, Muyingwa and Tiyo," she said gravely. "Shall we go out and watch them, you and I?"

XV

PASSING with Yahoya through the curtained doorway into the larger room, Northrup saw that at the wider entrance there were two young men standing, their backs turned toward him.

"Two of Muyingwa's men," said Yahoya. "He sent them to stand guard here."

Northrup stopped to offer his hand to each.

"If there is a fight," he said, "we fight together? That is good."

Their eyes upon his were hard and expressionless.

"We are Muyingwa's men," said one bluntly. "We obey our orders."

Again there were many men upon the ledge, all looking out toward the desert where their eyes had found the forms of the racers. Before Northrup and Yahoya had come to where they too could see, Strang had moved out of a knot of men and had come swiftly to meet them. A good deal of the bluster of a few hours ago had oozed out of him; he was looking anxious.

"Look here, Northrup," he said hurriedly, "it strikes me that there's going to be an almighty row in no time. You and I have had our troubles and there's no denying it. But at a time like this I guess we've got to remember we're white men stacked up against a bunch of damned Indians. You chip in on my side, and I'll see you through if we come out of this alive."

Strang was armed like the Indians; now Northrup was certain that the man had either lost his gun out in the desert or had had it taken away from him here.

"I'll chip in on your side," returned Northrup coldly, "not because I am fool enough to believe a man like you, Strang, but just because I see my one chance with your crowd."

He saw in Strang's eyes a quick light of eagerness. Then the light died down, the eyes grew anxious again. Plainly Strang was afraid. He sought to speak further, but Northrup and Yahoya passed on.

Everywhere were black looks turned upon them, many men sneering openly at Yahoya, who was no longer goddess, but mere maid; many of them speaking of him in ugly voices, which they did not seek to keep from his ears. Northrup looked at Yahoya swiftly; it was if she had neither seen nor heard.

But again men forgot them for the moment. Tiyo and Muyingwa from being mere slow, drifting dots grew into two men, striving mightily. From afar it was clear that they had fought their way, mile after mile, with skill and cunning and muscle. They were now two staggering, dust-covered forms, and no man yet could tell which was Muyingwa, which Tiyo.

On they came, plunging across the loose sand which caught at the feet that no longer might spurn it lightly, their lean bodies crouching, their arms dangling, their knees rising and falling only because stubborn wills drove them. On they staggered, neither man looking up, their hearts near bursting, their dry, dusty tongues lolling, their bodies rocking as in agony. On through a reeling world, with only a scant two or three yards between them.

And only silence greeting them, as men strove to see which of those dark, tortured forms grasping a wilted flower in a dangling hand, was Tiyo, which Muyingwa.

Then, at last, they had come so close to the base of the cliffs that they were recognizable human beings, no longer merely exhausted machines. A great crowd rumbled out to greet them then, many voices shouting together—

"Tiyo!"

For it was Tiyo in the lead. Even Northrup saw that now, and realized swiftly that Tiyo's winning would strengthen Tiyo's hand, so that there would be little hope for Muyingwa and those whom he stood ready to befriend.

At the shout the two men jerked up their heads. Their faces were twisted and haggard; their mouths dropped open; their eyes were wild, telling mutely of the anguish-racked bodies upon which so terrible a tax had been levied.

Then the heads dropped, the gaunt forms staggered on, feet sinking deep into the sand, being caught there, dragged out with effort more and more obvious. And still, no great distance between them and the end of the long run, Tiyo held his place in the lead.

Now many voices called out, "Muyingwa! Muyingwa!" but they called half-heartedly. Through the bedlam rose the shrill cry of a woman, a wail of grief; Nayangap, hurrying down the stairway to meet her defeated lover, carried to him a face scarcely less tortured than his own. Yahoya slipped her hand into Northrup's.

"Look," she whispered. "If to-day you fall, my husband, Yahoya will fall with you!"

The sun flashed a moment upon the keen blade she had slipped from her gown. Then, as quickly as it had come, the knife was gone, and she was pressing his hand hard.

On came Tiyo, staggering more drunkenly than ever, fighting for every step. On came Muyingwa just behind him, head down and dogged. Cheer after cheer broke out to greet the victor; cheer after cheer drummed into the ears of the man who had challenged and who was losing.

Inaa, his eyes seeming on fire, was drawing with a sacred *baho* a small circle at the head of the slope. Already were Tiyo's feet upon the harder ground, already was he plunging, reeling up the first of the hundred yards of incline. He swung up one arm with a visible effort, showing the fingers gripping the stem of the red flower. Inaa's voice, until now stilled, called out triumphantly:

"On, Tiyo, my son! The victor's circle, wherein is room for one man only, awaits you! On, Tiyo!"

Then Tiyo turned a little for the first time and saw Muyingwa's bowed, reeling form behind him. Tiyo's staring eyes and panting mouth grew into a twisted smile. Then Tiyo did not turn again.

As they ran the two men stumbled now, their numb feet striking against the stones in their path, each seeming ever upon the verge of falling. If Tiyo should indeed fall—if Muyingwa fell—then before either man could get upon his feet the race would be lost.

It seemed to Northrup that Muyingwa was driving some last ounce of reserve strength into his lagging limbs. It seemed while a man could not be certain, that he had shaved off a fraction of the half-dozen feet stretching between him and Tiyo. But if he had cut off an inch, what of it? There were but seventy-five yards now, and Tiyo was a man's height in advance.

Northrup caught a glimpse of a face thrust close up to his own, Strang's face. The blood had drawn out of it, leaving a strange pallor over the sunburned skin.

"The —— quitter!" groaned Strang. "He said he could beat Tiyo!"

"You talk about a quitter!" snapped Northrup. "Shut up!"

It seemed now that nothing less than miracle could save the day for Muyingwa, unless Tiyo should fall. And why should one fall rather than the other?

There was a flutter of white close by Inaa's side. Nayangap stood there, her arms thrown out toward the men racing so slowly up the broken slope.

"Muyingwa!" she called. "Muyingwa!"

He did not lift his head as he struggled on; he gave no sign that he had heard. And yet, in the silence which had fallen, a silence of breathless, intense eagerness, he could not but have heard.

"Tiyo!" thundered Inaa. "Tiyo! Ti-yo!"

"Muyingwa!" cried Nayangap. "Muyingwa!"

The eyes of those who watched, drawn for an instant to the forms of the old man and the young *mana*, came back quickly to the runners. Was it in the seeming only, or had Muyingwa crept a little closer? With hard ground underfoot, with Nayangap's voice ringing in his ears, had he added a little swiftness to his slow plodding? Had he, in fact, held a little reserve force for the final dash? Was Tiyo, already so close to the victor's circle, and with his rival in his rear, already the victor?

It was ending as a distance run so rarely ends, with the end in doubt until the very close of endeavor. Muyingwa was gaining. Tiyo was driving his muscles harder and harder at every lagging step to make them bend to his will. But they were only twenty-five yards from the goal, and Tiyo still led the way.

"Tiyo!" shouted Inaa.

"Muyingwa!" cried the girl, her voice throbbing in its appeal.

Then all were still, their bodies tense, their breathing hushed, their hearts beating thickly. Northrup's hand, gripping Yahoya's, grew into a vise, which at another time would have hurt her cruelly. Yahoya did not feel it.

There was no sound now save the rattle of stones set rolling, the thud, thud, thud of bare bleeding feet dropping heavily, the gasping breathing of Tiyo and Muyingwa. One might fancy that he heard the hammering of their hearts, despair in one not untinged with wild hope, victory in the other touched with dread. For Tiyo could hear Muyingwa's whistling breath close upon his right, a step behind.

So they came to the worst of the broken ground not a dozen yards from the circle Inaa had drawn. Here an exhausted man might fall if he were not wary. In each of the bursting hearts was the same thought: if a man fall now he sees his rival win.

Tiyo, having everything to lose, feeling himself already crowned with green leaves and yellow flowers, swerved a step to the left. Muyingwa, feeling the game all but lost already, kept straight ahead. His thudding feet struck among the jagged stones, which cut at them and tore them with cruel knife-edges. Muyingwa felt nothing, but flung himself forward, staggering, falling, catching himself, staggering on.

Tiyo saw him from the corner of his eye, abreast now, and, gathering his last strength, reeled on, gaining a little. Muyingwa saw a white, fluttering gown just there in front of him, saw Tiyo at his side, and made the supreme call upon his quivering muscles. He struck a stone in his way, pitching over it, close to falling for the hundredth time.

"Muyingwa!" Hardly more than a maid's whisper, but many men heard it. "My man!"

Tiyo had run his race, and was tottering almost at the rim of the circle his dizzy eyes could not see. Muyingwa was like a spent ball, plowing on with its own momentum. Tiyo's foot struck a little mound of loose dirt and he fell. As he went down he threw out his hand, and Muyingwa, striking it, fell with him. Both men down, and the goal just there, where it seemed either man might reach it!

Then men shouted as they had not shouted until now, so that Inaa's voice and Nayangap's were lost in the thunderous roar. The cañon echoes went mad with the word, "Tiyo, Tiyo, Tiyo!"

The cañon walls themselves seemed to have awakened, moved at last from their cold slumber, and to be shouting, "Muyingwa!" Northrup heard men yelling about him, and did not know that his own voice was lending its volume to theirs.

Would the men never get to their feet? Did they not know what hung upon them? Were they loitering now at the very end?

But they were up now. They were going on, both of them. It seemed as if they were seeking to drive men mad, lifting their feet so slowly, holding them so long suspended in air, taking such puny, baby steps ahead. Even their faces were drawn into grotesque grins, as if they were mocking those who clamored for them, jeering at the world. Who was ahead now? Their elbows struck.

But now men saw that at each slow step it was Tiyo who held longest balanced upon his spreading toes; it was Tiyo's leg which held longest suspended in air.

Muyingwa threw high up above his head the hand gripping the broken flower. Swaying terribly, Muyingwa set his foot over the circle.

Muyingwa stood first in the narrow circle wherein there is room for only one man. Then, staring stupidly at Nayangap he half turned, seeing through a blur another man coming on falteringly. Then Muyingwa, not hearing the roar of voices, dropped his arm, stooped a little, a little more, sought to lift his hand and could not, rocked blindly back and forth, and then, strength and consciousness going out of him, fell heavily. And as he fell, Tiyo's body pitched forward and fell across him.

XVI

"QUICK!" cried Northrup sharply. "Into your house, Yahoya. We must be ready now for what comes!"

Drawing her after him he hurried through the clamoring throng. He realized that now for a moment, men would not be thinking of him and Yahoya. Now was the time for him to get her where she would be safest. He would not have been afraid for Yahoya had it not been for the look he had seen in Inaa's eyes so few hours ago. The old man's temper would have hardly been sweetened by Tiyo's defeat, nor his anger at Yahoya lessened.

The two men Muyingwa had deputed to stand guard at the *kiva's* entrance had quite naturally forsaken their posts, but were back now as Yahoya and Northrup went in.

That day Northrup and Yahoya sat long alone together in her little room, waiting. Nor did time drag for them, there was so much in each heart which must be told to the other.

As the man looked into the clear gray eyes, fearless, and filled with the love she had given him so generously, he sought to close his thoughts to what might lie in the future for them both. One of the rare moments of a man's life had come to him when past and future are hazy and unimportant, when he lives richly and to the full in the glowing present. He no longer marveled at the love which had come to them. It seemed as natural a thing as the sunshine outside.

A third man joined the two at the door, spoke with them in quick, sharp tones, and went away. The two remained, keeping their silent watch, calm, seeming untouched by thought of a near crisis. Tocha came and brought food, saying that Nayangap was with Muyingwa, and that both her lover and Tiyo were like men whose souls had gone down to Maski.

All forms had disappeared from the ledge where the pool was. Yahoya's parrot swayed upon his branch, admired his gay plumage in the water's clear mirror, and flew to the *kiva* seeking his mistress. From the cañon where the men of the tribe were assembled came a voice only now and then at long intervals. Then, at last, came Nayangap, her eyes bright, her face suffused with happiness, a strange elation in her manner.

"Listen!" she cried to Yahoya, running to her mistress. "In a moment you will hear the shouting. Down there they proclaim Muyingwa head captain in Tiyo's place!"

"And Tiyo?" demanded Northrup eagerly. "What does he say about it?"

"Is not Muyingwa the greater man, the better?" the girl flashed at him. "Did not Muyingwa beat Tiyo so that all men might laugh?"

Northrup had not noted that Tiyo's defeat was so marked as that, but he said nothing. Yahoya smiled a little at her maid's loyal enthusiasm.

"Men who are wise and men who are good," ran on Nayangap, "will draw to Muyingwa's side, calling him their chief. Men whose hearts are black and who listen to the words of Inaa will stand with Tiyo. Then will Muyingwa lead his men out and strike down the men of Tiyo!"

Before she had finished Strang came hurriedly into the *kiva*, brushing by her rudely.

"Both of them are on their feet again," he said quickly. "They have eaten and drunk, and though they have been already through hell today, both of them are as fit right now as an ordinary man! What are the devils made of? And trouble is coming, coming quick!"

"Why then are you not with your men?" cried Yahoya swiftly. "It is you who have stirred them up to this madness, you with your whisperings! And now you come here—you coward!"

"Coward, am I?" he snarled at her. "What about the man you keep here with you?"

He broke off sharply. From the cañon came the mighty shout, "Muyingwa!" And, as had already so many times happened, an answering shout arose, "Tiyo!"

It had come. Until strength had crept back into the two exhausted bodies of their principals, the tribe had waited. Now, moved everywhere by Muyingwa's ringing words and Inaa's, fierce fire had flashed out of smoldering restlessness. There came other cries, sharper cries, the shriek of a man with a knife driven into his body.

Northrup, gathering Yahoya passionately into his arms, held her there a long moment. Then he pushed by Strang, and ran out to the edge of the cliffs.

BELOW, the men of the tribe had drawn into two compact masses, fronting each other ominously, their short stabbing spears lifted. Between them lay a man, writhing, slowly growing still. Northrup's first thought was that it might be Muyingwa or Tiyo. But another glance showed both of them in front of their factions.

Suddenly, Muyingwa shouted out something, and his men, following him, ran toward the long stairway. Tiyo saw, understood, and shouting bore down upon them. Northrup, seeing that both factions strove now for the higher ground, ran to the head of the stairway, his automatic gripped, ready for use.

The fighting began at the foot of the stairway. Already the two sides had mixed, for, although Muyingwa's men came first to the stair, its narrow steepness held them back a little. Northrup saw Muyingwa's form surrounded by his men, saw Tiyo and Inaa, and the great spare form of the man Strang had selected for head priest to replace Inaa. He saw the whole body of men bristling with short spears and great knives, the sun glittering upon them brightly, seething back and forth, struggling for the stair.

One by one Muyingwa's men in the fore were passing up; in the rear they were striking now, dealing death, and often enough being dragged down to the death.

And in the strange silence which fell over them, all the struggle down there looked some weird play, scarcely real. It was hard for him to convince himself that this was not a mock battle, that the distorted faces, the writhing of fallen bodies, was not all sham and skilful acting. About them the mountains were so serene, above, the skies so deep a blue, the whole atmosphere so charged with quiet peacefulness. High in air a vulture hung on motionless wings, watching with sharp eyes.

But when men fell stricken by those great knives and two-edged spears, they did not move from where they had fallen; or at best but dragged their wounded bodies a little way to fall and lie still. Tiyo's men pressed forward; Muyingwa's men held back, and many were swiftly mounting the stairs.

At that Northrup wondered. For certainly Muyingwa's force was larger than the one that attacked him, and as certainly Muyingwa was no coward. But now he drew his men back, ever back, until they had gained the stairway, while Tiyo's sinister crowd charged stubbornly.

Now men were contending everywhere, upon the floor of the cañon, along the cliff sides, even at the top of the stairway, close to where Northrup stood. He saw them go down under vicious thrusts, saw two of them, their arms locked about each other, their skins red with many wounds, reel outward and drop fifty feet. And as yet the gun in his hand was cold, for there was no way for him to determine which man was Muyingwa's man, which Tiyo's. And to chance a shot at Tiyo or at Inaa in that packed mass would be to waste lead, or perhaps to kill a friend of Muyingwa.

Now he saw something which he could not understand. He figured roughly that the tribe numbered between two and three hundred men. Muyingwa and the men with him now pressing up the steep way which led to the ledge were not over twenty-five in number; the party at Tiyo's heels could have numbered only about that. And down in the cañon the rest of the men, a great mass of them, had drawn aside, and were merely watching.

At last Muyingwa had come to the top. He stood there, shouting out his short commands, then stepped back, his men following him, leaving the way open for such men as might wish to come up after them. This again seemed madness to Northrup, who, grumbling, gave way with the others. It was Muyingwa's voice in his ear that explained.

"Let them come, Yellow Beard! We shall fight them here in the open, man to man!"

"But the others, down there?" demanded Northrup.

"It is my fight and Tiyo's. Each of us has chosen twenty-five of his young men. The rest watch. And I have chosen the Man of Wisdom and you to be of my number."

"Then," cried Northrup hotly, "why do you wait for them to come up with you? You have the advantage now; strike as they climb up!"

An odd smile touched Muyingwa's stern lips.

"It is in my heart to fight fair, Yellow Beard. It is not Muyingwa's wish to be named the 'Fox.' Men already speak of him as the Eagle Chief! Let them come!"

"Then," demanded Northrup, "why didn't you fight your fight down there? You had the chance."

Muyingwa shook his head.

"I will tell you, Yellow Beard, but time has passed for long words. I am the better man, and Tiyo knew that when he raced with me. But for trickery on his part I should have come into the circle an hour before him. Look!"

He threw up his arm, and for the first time Northrup saw a long gash in the man's side.

"When we were far out, where men could not see us," he said, his face black with his anger, "Tiyo, who was behind, ran like a madman that he might come up with me. I saved my strength, thinking he had lost his senses. Then, when he was upon me, I saw that he had carried a knife with him, concealing it cunningly under his arm. He would have killed me then had I not been the greater man! Even so—you saw it—I won over him."

All of Muyingwa's men were upon the ledge now. At their head man's command they had drawn back and were watching those with Tiyo come up.

"I have sworn an oath to the great gods," Muyingwa ended briefly. "I have promised them that if they let me triumph over Tiyo in the race, I should kill Tiyo with my own hands in a way that all men might see."

Up the stairway, after the last of Tiyo's men, came surging many others who were eager to stand back and see. Northrup, glancing about, saw that many others were climbing swiftly to the cliffs upon the opposite side of the cañon. After that he had little enough time or opportunity to see anything but the steely menace before him.

Tiyo's men, mistaken in the reason for Muyingwa's retreat, thinking that they had to do with men whose hearts were already failing them, bore on at a run, lifting their voices in a hideous charging shout. Each man carried his stabbing spear drawn a little back at his hip, so that when the moment came a quick thrust outward would drive the keen edges through a man's body. It came to Northrup, even at the moment before the running line struck, that Tiyo's was the better generalship, that Muyingwa's men, waiting, must go down before the force of the wild attack.

The spit of Northrup's gun was lost in the storm of shouting. But a man had thrown wide his arms and had gone down in a heap. They were twenty feet away, every running leap cutting the distance down so that Northrup must fire as fast as he could to empty the first clip. And he realized, and his lips tightened grimly, that he would have no chance for a second. And still Muyingwa's men were standing erect, waiting.

But they were men trained under Muyingwa's own eye, cool to the last, mindful of orders. Suddenly came Muyingwa's shout, and suddenly the spears in his men's hands were lifted. Lifted, balanced high overhead, and, when the eyes of the men charging them glared redly not three-spear lengths away, the short spears were hurled outward.

Then many of Tiyo's men went down on both sides of Tiyo himself, who came on, untouched.

The two lines met, Tiyo's men that were left wielding their spears mightily, Muyingwa's men driving home their broad-bladed knives with little coughing grunts. Northrup did not know that his gun was empty, that he had cast it down, that somewhere his hands had closed about a fallen spear. He only knew that about him surged a mad carnage, that men were shouting, cursing, shrieking; that a man drove at him with uplifted spear, only to graze his shoulder and to stop dead in his tracks with Northrup's spear driven fairly through his body.

Tiyo and Muyingwa had met at last. Northrup saw that dimly, as if through a fog, saw and forgot as again he was breast to breast with a great-bodied man, who was red with blood, and who held high above his head a dripping knife.

The knife swept downward, and Northrup felt it like a burning iron in his neck and shoulder. A wild rage came upon him; a burning hatred, and from then on nothing was clear to him, no emotion rode him, but the one unleased primitive desire to kill, kill, kill! He struck out savagely, and the man who had cut at him went down and did not move.

Tiyo and Muyingwa were still struggling; yonder two of Tiyo's men drove their spears through one man so that the steel heads struck together; yonder Strang, his face ashen, hurled his spear at a man who rushed down upon him and, missing, shrieked wildly; close to the edge of the precipice three men drove two back, fighting for every step of the way.

Then bigness of body and strength of limb stood Sax Northrup in such stead as never until now. Where the fray was thickest there was his great form, his clothes splotched red, his eyes spitting blue fire, his hair and beard wet with blood. When he struck, a man must give back; when he thrust, a man must go down; when a thirsting blade drank of his own blood, his roar was like the cry of a wounded lion.

Now it seemed that the struggle had swept like great whirlpools about two centers. Tiyo and Muyingwa had been swept apart, both wounded, both standing grimly up to their bloody work. A surging knot of men contended near the edge of the cliffs. Close to Yahoya's *kiva*, Muyingwa was in the center of a ring of glittering blades seeking him.

Through this ring of men came Northrup, like a mad bull breaking through a flimsy fence. Two men went down before him, and but one rose again.

He stumbled over a prone man, and did not know that it was Strang's body his foot had struck. Muyingwa was here, one man against a half dozen, and it was unfair fighting. That was the one thing perfectly plain to him.

But now no longer was Muyingwa one against six. Back to back stood Northrup and Muyingwa, the two biggest men upon the ledge. Muyingwa, striking swiftly, sent a shouting laugh out by way of greeting.

"Well done, Yellow Beard!" he shouted, and shouting, thrust. "Well done, brother!"

A man went reeling back from his thrust, another stepped into his place. Northrup struck out, and a man went down. But before he could jerk back his spear another menacing figure had leaped upon him.

Northrup saw and swung his body to the right, seeking to avoid the glittering death leaping out at him. Again he felt a pain like the searing of white-hot iron, this time in his shoulder, and he went down upon one knee, his teeth set hard, the thought upon him that soon or late a man must die, and it was well to die like a man. He had lived to the uttermost, his lips had touched the lips of Yahoya; he would not cry out at taking the bitter with the sweet.

But Muyingwa, hard pressed as he was, had seen, and the knife he was wielding now drove between Northrup and instant death, buried to the hilt in the body of the man over him. Northrup jerked himself to his feet, his groping hand sweeping up his fallen spear, blacker rage than ever before in his heart that he had seemed a lesser man than Muyingwa. And before his berserk rush men fell back, muttering.

There was a great shout from the men at the cliff's edge. Northrup, pursuing a man who fled nimbly before him, saw a dozen forms racing to meet him and braced himself against them. But he saw that they divided and swept about him, that they must be Muyingwa's men come at last to the aid of their chief.

And then Northrup felt suddenly weary, and crouched down close to the precipice. It seemed that it was all over. Men stood about and did nothing. Northrup was alive, so he supposed that his side had won in the bloody game of brutes. It had all begun so suddenly, seeming merely a hideous dream. It was ending so absurdly suddenly, still like some frenzied nightmare, with the broken men lying about him.

His eyes passed by the little knot of idle men, and he saw that it had not yet ended. Muyingwa still lived, Tiyo lived, and they alone fought on. Northrup watched them curiously.

They moved back and forth, spear opposing spear, the bright points leaping forward, jerking back, thrusting skilfully, guarding jealously where death might pay forfeit for the wink of an eyelid. But it seemed to Northrup that always they drew a little near to him, that it was Muyingwa who was forcing the fight, that steadily, but oh, so slowly, he was driving Tiyo back.

Northrup ran his hand across his dimming eyes and the hand came away wet. There was a cut across his forehead which puzzled him; he had felt no wound there.

Some one came running to him. He saw that it was Yahoya. He marveled at the look in her eyes. She dropped down beside him, her arms about him.

"Watch them, Yahoya," he said thickly. "It is Muyingwa against Tiyo now."

Yes, they were drawing closer. Now there could be no doubt of that. Both men were wounded, one could not guess how badly. But both fought savagely, desperately, knowing that only in death for one if not for both, could the blood feud end.

"It's Muyingwa's fight!" said Northrup slowly. "Can't you see it, Yahoya?"

Yahoya saw nothing in all the world but her lover, crouching at her feet, her lover wounded in a dozen places. She sought to answer, but her voice broke.

"Look at their eyes," Northrup insisted. "You can guess the end in a man's eyes at a time like this, Yahoya. Tiyo is just desperate, seeking to postpone the end. Muyingwa is filled with elation. He has made a promise to his gods! Can't you see the difference?"

Yahoya sobbed and knelt, drawing her arms tighter about him. On they came, Tiyo lunging heavily, but always on the guard; Muyingwa, lighter of foot, his eyes bright with hard laughter and steely with hatred. On, until they were so close that Yahoya and Northrup must move a little to the side; on until Tiyo dared take no further step backward for fear of a plunge to death on the rocks below.

Then Muyingwa, calling out loudly, struck such a blow as he had not yet struck The haft of his spear broke against Tiyo's right wrist, and his shattered weapon and Tiyo's fallen one struck the ground together.

While men looked on, their mouths agape, Muyingwa sprang forward, only his hands lifted against the knife which Tiyo had whipped from his belt with his left hand. As Tiyo's hand went up, Muyingwa's rose with it. As Tiyo's sought to drive downward, Muyingwa's fingers shut hard about his wrist.

Now they struggled man to man, body to body, their muscles cracking, the sweat running from them like water, red sweat across deep cuts. Slowly Tiyo's hand came down, the pointed blade finding its sheath only in the empty air. Down and down, though Tiyo strove wildly to wrest it away from the fingers which shut like iron talons about his wrist. And slowly Muyingwa forced Tiyo back toward the cliff's edge.

"I have sworn, Tiyo," panted Muyingwa, "with my two hands, to cast you straight down into Maski! See how I keep my promise!"

Men gasped out at what they saw. The skin upon Muyingwa's bowed back seemed splitting asunder with the bunching of the muscles under it; the veins in his arms and forehead threatened to burst. But the fierce flames in his eyes were undimmed by thought of failing power.

For an instant the two struggling forms grew still, only the slow swelling of a muscle, the hard breathing, telling that they lived and strove. But it seemed that strength was flowing out of Tiyo, fresh strength flowing into Muyingwa.

Slowly one man bent under the other's iron hands. Slowly Tiyo's body twisted as Muyingwa's fingers commanded; slowly Muyingwa forced him down to his knees.

Then—there was no slowness now, Muyingwa's movement being like a flash of light—Tiyo was swept upward in the other's grasp as he had before been swung aloft in Northrup's. Their shadows fell across Northrup. Looking up he saw Tiyo's wildly beating arms above him.

An instant he thought they were both going together. Then he saw that with a last mighty effort Muyingwa had broken Tiyo's clutch upon him, and, as a great roar rose up from the hundreds who watched, Tiyo was flung far out.

Then Northrup gave up to the sickness upon him and was quite content to sink back into Yahoya's arms.

XVII

"IT WAS a good fight, my brother!" Northrup, lying upon the couch in Yahoya's little room, Yahoya's hand held in his, looked up to see the tall, gaunt form of Muyingwa in the doorway.

"Now," went on Muyingwa slowly, "am I a great man among my people! Now am I head captain of the People of the Hidden Spring. There is no man among all in the Seven Cities who will not have Muyingwa's name upon his lips. Time may come—who can look into the darkness of unborn tomorrow?—when Muyingwa may step up to be Overlord of all the cities of Chebo! And, my brother, there was a time when we fought yonder, when Muyingwa was close to his death, and Yellow Beard came to fight the fight with Muyingwa, forcing through spearmen like a hungry wolf through little rabbits! *Askwali!* You are my brother, Yellow Beard! Muyingwa, thirsting on the desert, would share his last cup of water with you."

"As for that," answered Northrup, "we are even. You saved my life for me——"

"It was nothing," cut in Muyingwa. "I struck down one man who threatened you. You hurled yourself upon many. You shall see that I am no man to forget. We wait here until your wounds are whole; then we move on to Chebo. There already has Inaa run to tell his lies; but men shall know them for lies. I shall enter the city as a great man; Nayangap shall go at my side, a great lady for great ladies to wait upon. And you, at my right, shall go, not as the other Bahana who died like a coward, but as Muyingwa's brother. As Muyingwa rises, you shall rise, Yellow Beard!"

Had one spoken thus to the old Sax Northrup, saying, "I will lead you to rich cities unknown to white men, where perhaps there is wealth to be got and power!" there would have been only eagerness in his heart. But now—he shook his head.

"Muyingwa," he said slowly, "it seems to me that it is only a little thing I have done for you, no greater than the thing you have done for me. So let us put it aside. You are a man as I am a man, Muyingwa, and you have called me brother. We may speak plainly with each other.

"It is not in my heart to go with you to Chebo to become a great man under your hand. It is my wish to be what I have always been, a man free to follow what trail he wishes. The trail I must follow leads away from you, and back to the world of the Bahanas. You must let us go, Yahoya and me."

Muyingwa stared at him frowning. Northrup, looking into the man's hard eyes, felt his heart sink. Yahoya pressed his hand softly.

"We shall be happy even here, Saxnorthrup!" she whispered.

Muyingwa silently lifted his hand. A dozen of his men came into the main room of the *kiva*.

"Tell Yellow Beard," said Muyingwa to the man who stood at their head, "what are the vows the soldier must take when he is no longer a boy, but a man, when the Chief Priest and the Overlord of the Seven Cities put spear and knife into his hands."

The man looked at him curiously as he answered:

"The young soldier swears that in all things he will obey blindly the command of the captain above him; that he will die before he break one of the Five Priestly Orders; that torture will not drive him to forget what is the chief cause of his people."

"Tell him," went on Muyingwa, "what is the oath a soldier must take when he becomes such as I, a head man."

"That he will, in all things, obey the command of the Overlord; that the Five Priestly Orders are supreme in his heart; that though the gods themselves commanded he would not forget the chief cause of his people."

"Tell him," said Muyingwa, "what is this chief cause of our people."

"It is this," answered the man: "There shall come among us no Bahana to despoil our empire. If a Bahana come he shall be as a prisoner among us; and above all things, no Bahana shall go forth from us to talk of what he has seen."

"You hear, Yellow Beard?" demanded Muyingwa, his tone seeming suddenly to have grown savage.

"I hear," answered Northrup.

"Then," cried Muyingwa, so that the sound of his voice reverberated strangely in the stone room, "hear what Muyingwa says to you! Before Muyingwa there may be great riches and honor, or there may be death. Today you saved Muyingwa's life, and he used great words of his gratitude to you. He called you brother. Now it is in your heart to go back to your own people. What is my answer? You are a man as I am a man. You love a maiden as I love a maiden. I have said 'Brother' to you! Here is my word:

"You are no liar as was the Man of Wisdom. Tell me that you will tell no living man the way to come upon the people of the Seven Cities, and I will believe you. I will go with you, you and Yahoya, across the desert, leaving Inaa to spin what lies he likes in the ear of the Overlord. I will bring my men with us, bearing in their hands things of gold, to make a great lord of you in your own land. And then I will leave you and come back to what awaits me in Chebo. When Muyingwa says 'Brother,' it is with his heart."

Northrup stepped forward swiftly, his breast swelling deeply to the emotion bursting from his heart, his eyes shining, his hand shutting hard, hard upon the hand of Muyingwa.

"What you ask, I promise," he said simply. "I give you my word—Brother!"

For a moment these two strong men, who in verity had come from the ends of the earth, stood, hands locked, looking deeply into each other's eyes. And as the two hands fell away, through the stillness of the room could be heard Northrup's sigh and Muyingwa's as one.

"It is better," whispered little Nayangap, "to be a man than a god!"

Yahoya slipped swiftly to her feet, came to Muyingwa's side, and lifted his hand to her lips. Her eyes were bright, and there was the glitter of tears in them.

"You are a man of a great heart," she cried softly. "For does not Yahoya know that in Chebo you will have to stand trial before the Overlord for the thing which you have done? That Inaa, whose power is great, will cry loudly for your death? That only if Muyingwa's power has grown in the night and he has the secret ear of Kish-Taka will death be averted?"

"Muyingwa is not without power," was the calm answer. "Not without favor in the eyes of Kish-Taka, the Overlord. And Muyingwa is not a coward."

THERE came a star-filled night when Muyingwa's tall form, leading his men, was turned away from them as he slowly moved back into the desert toward the hidden cities. Northrup and Yahoya, standing side by side, watched him until at last the night swallowed him.

At the foot of a great mesquite were buried in the sand the things which Muyingwa's men had brought from the place of the People of the Hidden Spring, many things of heavy gold. To-morrow Northrup would come back here for them. Now they had passed out of his thought.

"For there is a thing greater than gold!" he whispered, as he opened his arms for her. "And we have found it, Yahoya."

So as Muyingwa turned back to seek that which lay in the future for him, Sax Northrup and Yahoya turned their eyes toward the shadowy outlines of their own dreamings.

Some Fishing

by Frederick William Wallace

Author of "In the Bank Fog," "The Education of Billy Stream," etc.

THE halibut fishing-schooner *Leona T. Himmelman* of Anchorville, Nova Scotia, was jogging in a dense fog a few miles to the eastward of Cape Observation, Island of Anticosti. The skipper, Johnny Himmelman, had been looking for the fish all the way from West Point and had an idea that halibut might be struck in the deep water on the north shore of the island.

The *Leona T. Himmelman* was a ninety-five-ton semi-knockabout schooner carrying eight double-trawl dories and a crew of nineteen men. The skipper and a few members of the crew hailed from Lunenburg County, which accounted for his Teutonic name.

Captain Johnny could speak German and had a taste for certain German dishes —sauerkraut being one of them. Though German in origin, and retaining many of the old German tastes and ideas, Captain Himmelman was a Canadian first, last and all the time, and his eldest son, Corporal Roy Himmelman, was even then in France, fighting the Empire's battle in the ranks of the First Canadian Expeditionary Force.

With her jumbo weathered up, the mainsheet started and the wheel down a spoke or two, the schooner swashed lazily over the fog-shrouded sea, marking time until the morning, when the dories would be swung over and a "set" made for the valuable flat fish. On deck, the two fishermen on watch smoked and lolled against the lee nest of dories. They did not bother sounding the mechanical fog-horn, as traffic on the north shore of Anticosti was scarce, being but rarely navigated by any other craft than fishing-vessels.

Below in the cabin, the skipper and some other members of the crew read old Halifax papers and discussed the all-absorbing topic of the war.

"I cal'late dat feller of mine will be in der trenches now," remarked the skipper, puffing away at his pipe. "I got a card from him marked 'Somewhere in France.' "

"He ain't seen nawthin' o' them submarines, has he?" queried a fisherman, busy overhauling a skate of halibut gear.

"Said der transport was chased by one o' dem off der Irish coast," answered Captain Johnny, "but der navy boats chased der submarine away."

"Ain't they the divil now, them submarines!" said another. "They say they kin travel acrost th' Western Ocean an' back an' stay fur days under water. How d'ye s'pose they kin cotch them beggars?"

"Shoot at der periscope, I cal'late," replied the skipper, "or ram dem. I cal'late dat's de only way mit dem."

"It's a wonder none o' them comes acrost to this here gulf an' lays for th' Montreal boats comin' out with th' sojers aboard. Ef they kin travel th' distance they say they kin, why don't they?"

"They'd need more gasoline to take them back," said a fisherman, looking up from the newspaper he was reading. "They kin only carry ile enough to bring them out——"

An oilskinned figure appeared in the gangway.

"Say, Skip, fur th' love o' Mike, hev a look up here! There's a bloomin' spar-buoy or somethin' headin' agin th' tide off'n th' starb'd beam. Come up quick!"

THE skipper and a few of the men jumped on deck and stared in the direction indicated by the fisherman's mittened hand. The fog was hanging heavy over the smooth surface of the sea, and about a cable's length away a small gray-colored pole was traveling slowly in a westerly direction.

"It's movin' all right," remarked one of the fishermen. "Looks like a spar——"

"Limb o' a water-logged tree, I cal'late," said some one sarcastically.

"Aye, headin' to wind'ard agin' th' tide!" countered another. "Use th' small amount o' brains God give ye."

"It's us that's movin'—not it," growled the other. "A driftin' spar-buoy or maybe a halibuter's watch-buoy on the end o' his gear."

The object was vanishing from sight in the mist when the skipper, who had been staring at it through his marine glasses, suddenly exclaimed:

"Bubbles! A reg'lar wake an' der bubbles! By yiminy, boys, dat's der periscope of a blasted Yerman submarine!"

All hands were on deck now, staring into the fog, and for a minute no one spoke. A German submarine in the Gulf of St. Lawrence! It was incredible! The simple-minded Canadian fishermen, plying their vocation on the waters off that deserted Anticosti shore, could scarce believe that one of the enemy's deadly engines of war would venture across the Atlantic to these peaceful waters so remote from the prescribed area of submarine warfare.

"What's her business here?" A husky fisherman broke the silence.

"Layin' for th' Montreal troopships, I cal'late!"

"Sufferin' Judas!" growled a New Brunswick man. "I hev a brother in one o' them Montreal kilty regiments leavin' soon. What'll we do, Skip?"

The smoke was coming from Johnny Himmelman's pipe in a veritable cloud, a sure sign that he was thinking.

"Dere's a telegraph at Natashkwan an' dat's 'bout fifty miles to de no'theast. Fox Bay's 'bout de same to der east'ard. Mit der engine goin' we kin make eider o' dem in 'bout eight hours——"

"Here's a vessel comin'," cried a man standing for'ard.

"A warship, by Jupiter!" shouted some one. "She's chasin' th' submarine, I'll bet."

The pulsating of engines throbbed across the water and the fishermen peered into the mist excitedly.

"Thar she is!"

A shadowy hull loomed out of the pall and masts and spars broke into hazy view. The sight of a bowsprit, with a trio of furled jibs lying upon it, caused the skipper to speak in surprise.

"What der defil! Dat ain't no warship. Dat's a t'ree-mast, tops'l schooner mit an auxiliary engine——"

"Look's like a Frenchman from Sint-Malo. What's one o' them craft adoin' up here? They're Grand Bank craft—By Jupiter! He'll be into us! Hi-yi! Sheer off, you!"

A bull-roared shout of warning came

from all hands on the *Leona Himmelman's* decks, as the skipper sprang for the wheel and hove it up.

"Draw away der yumbo!" he bawled, as the other craft drove down on their port bow.

The lookout on the other vessel must have seen them. A guttural shout came from her forecastlehead. Their wheel was put hard aport, and the big schooner, her decks crowded with men and dories, forged past the Canadian fishing-vessel, but a scant twelve feet between them.

"*Sacré!*" shouted a voice. "Why t' —— ain't you soundin' der horn? —— Anglais!"

"What vessel's dat?" roared Himmelman.

"Schooner *Yuno* of Fecamp, cod-fishing. Who's dat vessel?"

"*Leona T. Himmelman* of Anchorville, halibuting. See any halibuters to de east'ard?"

"Yaw!" came the voice out of the fog, as the larger vessel swept by.

"Two or t'ree schooners fishing off Heath Point. *Au revoir, m'sieu!*"

Captain Himmelman stared abstractedly into the wall of mist which swallowed up the Frenchman. Scratching his head wonderingly, he inquired of the gang loafing around:

"Did any of you fellers read der name of dat craft as he went past?"

"Aye," answered a fisherman. "'*Juno* of Fecamp' was on her stern board. Didn't ye hear him sing out her name? I c'd hear him plain enough."

"Yah, I heard him," answered the skipper slowly. "But he said '*Yuno*' instead of '*Yuno*.'"

"You're Dutch, Skipper," laughed the other. "You mean he said '*Yuno*' instead of '*Juno*.'"

"Aye, yust so," replied Himmelman. "I'm Dutch and can't pronounce my yays —I cal'late dat oder feller was Dutch too. A Frenchman ain't a 'yaw-for-yes man.' When dat feller first sighted us under his bows, he sung out 'hard aport' in Yerman. Boys! I'm a Nova Scotia Dutchman, but I kin spot an old-country Deutscher ten faddom away, an' I'll bet a dollar to a doughnut dat dat French fishin'-craft ain't nawthin' but a Yerman supply-boat follering dat submarine!"

Fishermen of the deep-sea type are quick thinkers, and Captain Johnny Himmelman was as smart as any of them. For a few minutes he sat on the wheel-box, shrouded in a pall of tobacco smoke which rivaled the fog for density, and his methodical German-Canadian brain arrayed the suspicious facts and evolved a plan of action.

He had many things to consider. First of all he wanted to get his valuable information to the Dominion Government. Natashkwan, on the north shore of the gulf, fifty miles northeast, was a Government telegraph station. Fox Bay on Anticosti Island was a small lobster cannery settlement with a private telephone-wire to Heath Point signal-station. At Heath Point there was a powerful Marconi apparatus which could flash the news to the mainland or a government patrol boat. Fox Bay was also some fifty miles to the eastward along the Anticosti shore.

"Hey ye go, fellers!" he shouted at last. "Hook der stays'l halyards on to dat power dory and git her over. Put a ten-gallon can o' gasoline in and some water and grub. Jack Hanson an' you, Tom Peters, git in an' make for Fox Bay. See de boss at de lobster factory dere an' telephone to de lighthouse at Heath Point. Tell dem dat a Yerman submarine and a supply-schooner passed along de north shore of de Anticoast an' git dem to send a man-o'-war as quick as possible. Away you go, boys. I'll stand to de west'ard an' look for dem queer craft."

Within five minutes the power dory was hoisted over, and the two fishermen grabbed their oilskins and jumped in. A deft turn of the fly-wheel and a "So long, fellers!" and the little boat puttered into the fog on her fifty-mile journey.

The skipper watched them vanish and turned to the waiting gang.

"Now, boys, we'll tack ship an' head to de west'ard, along shore. Maybe we'll locate dem pirate Yermans."

II

WHEN Captain Himmelman headed the schooner in the direction the submarine and her supposed consort had taken, he had absolutely no idea of a plan of action. Neither he nor the gang took into consideration the danger of such a step, or had any idea as to what they would do should they discover the enemy craft. As a fisherman would say, "They barged along to find out things for themselves."

The wind was westerly and freshening, and with the four lowers, the balloon jib and the big fisherman's staysail set, they swung close-hauled up the coast within a mile or two of the fog-shrouded land. Over the windlass lolled a group of men, smoking and conjecturing. Aft at the wheel, the skipper glanced alternately at sails and compass and blew mighty clouds of smoke. The loafing trawlers refrained from curious questions and left the skipper to his thoughts.

"Keep a good lookout for'ard, fellers," cautioned Himmelman after a while. "Look an' listen. We don't want to pass dem in de fog."

They held on through the mist and passed Cape Observation, by soundings, about five in the afternoon. Supper was a hastily gobbled meal that evening, as most of the gang preferred to be on deck keeping a lookout. By the laughing comments and remarks passed among the men, one would imagine they were out on a picnic instead of looking for a German submarine. One significant aspect, however, was the sight of four fishermen seated on the house aft and busy oiling and cleaning two double-barreled shot-guns, a Winchester "thirty-thirty" and an old Snider rifle of the make sold extensively in rural localities for five dollars.

The god Chance threw them across the track of their quarry with a suddenness which was almost startling. The mist lifted landward and disclosed the topsail schooner and the under-water boat lying, side by side, a cable's length away on the *Leona Himmelman's* port quarter.

"Thar she is!" roared a dozen voices at once, and as their excited shouts carried across the water, the topsail schooner started her engine and sheered away from the huge submersible.

"Stand by der sheets!" bawled Himmelman excitedly. "Swing her off!"

The gang jumped to bitt and cleat, vaguely wondering what the skipper intended to do. The wheel was being rolled up by the great hands of Himmelman, and the able schooner was paying off rapidly.

"Stand by for a yibe!" he almost howled.

"What are ye goin' to do, Skip?" cried the crowd from their various stations. "Runnin' for it?"

"Run be ——!" answered the Lunenburger, his face ablaze with excitement. "I'm agoin' to ram dat dere submarine. Let der sheets run and hang on when I hit him, for, by yiminy, we'll hit hard!"

Crash! The booms came over and fetched up on the patent jibers with the shock incidental to jibing all standing in a fresh breeze; shouting and cursing men caught the turns on the sheets, and as the schooner drove for the submarine with the big mainboom over the port rail and the foreboom over the starboard, the men cleaning the guns commenced slipping in cartridges and banging away at the submersible's crew hastily scrambling into the conning-tower amidships.

They had good reason to be afraid. A ninety-five-ton fishing-schooner, with her great sails bellying iron hard with a strong breeze and a welter of white water roaring up from under her bows, is an awesome sight.

The great spars towering aloft for one hundred and twenty-five feet and clothed with canvas from topmast truck to deck constitutes a formidable driving-power to a deep hull laden with forty-five tons of ballast and fifty tons of ice, salt and fish. The German raiders sensed it, and no sooner was the last man below and the conning-tower hatch clamped, than the great war-fish began to dive.

"She's divin', Skip!" yelled Tommy Morrissey from forward.

The rifles and shot-guns kept a continual fusillade on the turret which was beginning to disappear from sight into a swirl of water; the schooner drove ahead at a twelve-knot clip, a thing of life, eager and vengeful, ready to smash her storming stem on the fragile cylinder sinking into the sea under her bows.

Twenty feet! The conning-tower had vanished leaving only the periscope, an air pipe and two steel wireless masts above water. Ten feet! These also disappeared and the fishermen on the *Leona Himmelman's* decks howled and squirmed with disappointed rage. The schooner stormed over the great vortex of the submarine's displacement and the men swore, shook their clenched fists and yelled meaningless expressions with the savagery of primeval man cheated of his prey.

All but Tommy Morrissey. Tommy kept his head, like the long-sighted old trawler that he was, and as the schooner surged for the vanished under-sea boat, he deftly cast the shank painter of the starboard anchor adrift, severed the ring stopper with a shack knife and leaped for the butt of the bowsprit as the great seven-hundred-pound anchor crashed for the bottom with thirty fathom of chain cable thundering through the hawse-pipe.

Instinctively the gang ran aft or jumped feet first down into the forecastle. The schooner fetched up in her headlong career with a terrific jerk, and with tremendous cracks both masts snapped at the deck and the spars hurtled down in a welter of twanging wire stays and thunderously flapping canvas.

Himmelman, crouching down by the wheel, caught sight of Morrissey crawling out from the protection of the bowsprit butt, and he raced forward, leaping over the wreckage with fists clenched.

"You infernal swab!" he yelled. "What dit you mean by dat crazy trick?"

Morrissey glanced over the bows, noted something, and closed with the infuriated skipper.

With the old fisherman's arms around him, Himmelman struggled to plant a blow. "I'll murder you," he screamed. "You——"

"Easy, Skip! Go easy!" shouted the other without relaxing his bear's hug. "Can't you see, you crazy Dutchman? She's bein' towed, you fool! She's bein' towed! Can't ye understand, or will I have to bash some sense inter yer thick nut? The anchor's hooked inter that gaudy submarine. That's why I cast her adrift!"

The skipper jumped for the rail and looked over. A ripple played around the *Leona's* bows and the chain cable led out straight ahead. He stared at the convincing sight for several seconds and turned slowly to the triumphant Morrissey.

"Waal, by yiminy!" he ejaculated. "If dat don't beat all my goin' afishin'! She's hooked for sure. Swamp me, if dat ain't th' queerest goldarned fish I ever hooked in all my days——an' mit de anchor for a hook. Sink me!"

ALL hands speedily made their way forward to satisfy themselves that Morrissey's claim was correct, and the increasing gurgle of the bow wave and the chain cable straightening out ahead soon convinced them.

"By golly!" remarked the skipper. "Funny thing dat we should have had dat range of chain over de windlass, all ready. I was for anchoring tonight, but when she started breezing up I changed my mind. Boys, ye'd better clear away dis raffle. Lash dem spars an' we'll tow dem astern. Cut de sails adrift and fetch dem aboard. Yiminy! She's smashed up dem rails and stanchions in good shape. Git busy now!"

With feverish haste, the men cut and slashed the spars clear of the encumbering rigging and sails, and bending on warps allowed the mainmast, foremast and mainboom to tow astern. The lighter gaffs and booms were kept on deck.

Himmelman gazed over the taffrail with a glance of approval.

"Dey will help to make us tow harder. Ha! ha!"

The submarine was still submerged and hauling the dismasted fishing-schooner along at a speed of four or five knots. The topsail schooner had vanished into a wall of fog which still hung over the water to seaward.

"That under-water craft'll be for comin' up an' havin' a look 'round soon," remarked a fisherman apprehensively. "What are we agoin' to do then?"

"What ef she does?" growled another. "What kin she do? She can't git adrift from us. That seven-hunder-pound anchor'll hev bitten well inter some part o' her top deck. Them flukes'll go through thin steel easy and th' way o' this vessel under sail 'ud make them bite for further orders. That anchor's fast for keeps. Th' way she fetched up an' jumped th' spars out 'ud tell ye that——"

"Aye, that may be so, but s'pose that there submarine starts to dive deeper an' drag this here hooker under?"

"Yes! And ef she did we'd moor her for all time soon's we filled an' sunk. We c'd batten down an' we couldn't be sunk. 'Sides, that submarine ain't strong enough to drag this craft down."

"S'pose she comes up alongside an' tries to board us? What then?"

"We got guns, ain't we? They kin only crawl out that connin'-tower one at a time, an' I cal'late we c'd pick 'em off nicely."

"By Jupiter!" broke in Morrissey. "They might try an' loose a torpedo at us.

With thirty fathom of chain out, it might give him a chanst to swing around an' give us a shot that 'ud blow us to flinders."

"For'ard dere, fellers, an' heave short!" yelled the skipper instantly. "Git twenty faddom o' dat cable aboard, quick!"

The crowd had the brakes shipped and were windlassing in the links ere the words were out of Himmelman's mouth. Never did men heave down on windlass bars with such efforts as did the *Leona's* gang. The most exacting Yankee wind-jammer mate could not have roused a homeward-bounder's mud-hook aboard in quicker time.

Panting and sweating, they clustered in the waist and gazed at the bubbling wake ahead. The skipper had his pipe going again and was busy thinking, with the wheel in his hands. The submarine was towing them to the eastward, just the direction that Himmelman wanted.

"She's a-comin' up, Skip!" cried a man, pointing ahead to where the periscope was emerging from the water.

Himmelman laughed and gave the wheel a savage wrench.

"We'll steer wild," he said easily, "and give him some drag—Yiminy!"

A terrific explosion shook the vessel, and the fishermen were thrown to the deck. Splinters of wood flew high into the air followed by a tower of water which came like a cloudburst from aloft and almost swamped the dismasted *Leona*. The atmosphere reeked with the acrid fumes of a high explosive.

"Holy mackerel!" cried the gang as they scrambled to their feet, almost deafened and blinded by the shock. "We're torpedoed!"

The water was sluicing off the schooner's smashed decks, and the skipper looked around.

"De vessel ain't hit!" he cried. "It's de spars towin' astern—Yudas! He's shot a torpedo out of his stern and it missed us when I give her de wheel dat time. Haul up on him, fellers, or, by Yupiter, he'll be givin' us anoder! Yump, fellers, yump! Shoot away dat periscope, somebody!"

The crowd ran for the windlass brakes and plied them desperately, while Dexter Anson plumped five thirty-thirty bullets into the head of the periscope. At such close range, the mirrors were effectually smashed and the U-boat was rendered helpless as an under-water menace.

Slowly but surely, with fifteen husky men on the windlass brakes, the chain came in link by link until the fishermen could discern the black bulk of the submarine in the clear green water ahead. Its propellers were churning up the water almost under the bowsprit of the fishing-schooner.

"They cal'late they've blown us up," remarked Morrissey sagely, "so, with that perryscope out o' business, they'll come out for a look. They kin see through them glass ports in that there turret. Thar she comes now—jest like a whale. See ef ye can put some shots through them glass ports, Dexter."

The fisherman with the rifle took careful aim and fired, and the submarine dived again.

"I cal'late we got him jammed in a clinch!" joyously ejaculated Morrissey, as he watched the great steel hull subside. "We've got that there fish poke-hooked, by Godfrey! He can't do nawthin' nohow but drag us to blaze-an-gone-out acrost to Dutchland."

"That's just th' divil of it," remarked the cook. "Ain't we got no way of stoppin' him? He's liable to tow us off somewheres an' we'll miss th' man-o'-war that th' boys hev gone to Fox Bay to fetch."

"By golly, but de cook's right!" said the skipper. "We'll have to stop dat beggar somehow——"

"You bet we will!" interrupted Dexter Anson dolefully. "I ain't got no more cartridges left. Thar's no more ammunition but three number sixes for the shotguns, and ef them Germans take a notion to come up and open fire on us, we're done for."

The ingenious Morrissey smashed his great fist on the staysail box.

"Boys," said he triumphantly, "I've an idea that I cal'late will work. I'll git them jibsheet chains and crawl out on th' bowsplit. You fellers heave ahead on that windlass and I'll drop them chains inter his perpellers. Ef that don't fetch him up, I'm a Dutchman myself."

Quickly unshackling the sheets from the jib, Morrissey made each of them fast to a piece of line and crawled out on the bowsprit, with Dexter Anson lugging the chains along the foot-ropes. While the rest of the gang manned the windlass again, Morrissey sat astride the bowsprit-end and swung the chain as he would heave a lead.

Anson, on the foot-ropes, held the lines already bent to the sheets.

"Watch, there, watch!" cried Morrissey, carefully judging the distance from the spar to the boiling froth a few feet ahead of him. "Heave!"

The chain flew from his hands and shot into the submarine's wake.

"Nawthin' doin'!" bawled Anson, as he felt the weight of the chain on his line. "Try again, Tommy, boy!"

He hove the chain up again and passed it along to Morrissey, who made another attempt.

"Must have guards over them wheels," growled he, after four unsuccessful attempts. "Haul up on him a bit more, boys! Another fathom ahead and I'll be able to drop 'em right down on them screws. Ready? Stand by, Dexter. Heave!"

The fishermen clustered over the bows gave vent to an excited shout of triumph as the retaining line was whipped out of Anson's hands.

"She's fouled!" roared Morrissey. "Gimme that other chain for th' port screw! Heave!"

The watchers held their breath and expelled it in a joyous howl as the line almost wrenched Anson from his perch.

"She's snarled, by the holy old sailor!" he yelled as he clutched at the back-rope to save himself from falling. "She's stopped."

In the midst of their triumph, the skipper gave vent to an excited ejaculation and pointed to the sea-line astern. In the glow of the sunset, the square sails of a sailing-vessel were silhouetted some five miles away.

"Dat tops'l schooner!" he cried. "An' she's headin' for us. We'll have to beat it!"

"Beat it?" questioned the gang.

"Yes, beat it, an' —— quick. Dere's 'bout t'irty men aboard dat craft an' dey may have guns."

"What about this here submarine? Will we cut her adrift?"

The skipper thought for a moment.

"No! We'll moor her. Knock out the first shackle on that chain cable abaft the windlass and bend de fishin' hawser and de port anchor to it. When we're ready we'll let go, and Mister Submarine will be moored to t'ree hundred faddom of good eight-inch manila hawser and an eight-hundred-pound anchor. He'll hang to dis forty-faddom water for all time even ef he clears dose chains from his screws. Billy, go down aft and start de engine. We'll have to git out quick!"

THE bleak shore of northern Anticosti was about two miles away and the sun was setting. It was hazy to the eastward and nothing broke the sea line but the somber shores of the island and the rapidly approaching schooner.

"All ready for'ard?" shouted Himmelman from the wheel.

"All ready, Skipper!"

"Den let her go!"

The men had bent the chain of the anchor which was fast to the U-boat to the cable of the Banker's fishing-anchor and with a heave of the fluke bar sent the big mud-hook crashing to the bottom with the great fishing hawser snaking out after it. The chain cable was clear of the windlass and with engine going, the dismasted fishing-schooner backed away from the still submerged submarine.

"She's moored for fair, now, Skip!" remarked a man. "Lord Harry, but we've had some fun this afternoon! Ha, ha!"

As they sheered off, the rugged fishermen gave vent to expressions of relief.

"Some fishing!" they said gleefully. "Won't Jack Hanson an' Tom Peters be sore at missing this day's sport?"

As they drew away, the submarine slowly emerged to the surface. A man crawled out of her conning-tower, followed by three or four others. A forward hatch also opened and the submarine's decks were crowded with men who shouted and shook their fists at the retreating fishing-schooner.

Suddenly a disappearing gun elevated itself from the submersible's decks; two men swung the muzzle around; there was a flash of fire in the twilight and a shell struck the *Leona* forward by the windlass and exploded with a stunning detonation. Luckily all hands were mustered aft and flopped to the deck as soon as they saw the gun.

Bang! Another shell struck the stump of the foremast and blew the forecastle hatch into a mess of splintered and shredded wood.

"Holy mackerel!" cried a man anxiously. "There's agoin' to be some killin' yet. What are we agoin' to do, Skip?"

"Kin we run for it?" inquired Morrissey looking at the skipper.

Crash! A shell struck the rail amidships and tore the gunwales off the dory on the port nest.

"Lord Harry, Skipper!" shouted the crowd in a panic. "We're agoin' to git killed!"

Himmelman's usually placid face was white now. He wasn't afraid, but he was mad—berserker mad. Rolling the wheel over, he swung the *Leona* around on her heel and headed for the submarine.

"Gedt down, boys, down on der deck!" he shouted, relapsing in his excitement into broken English and German. "I'll finish dot feller, by ——!"

Plunk! A shot struck the water astern of them as the schooner forged ahead at eight knots under the drive of the powerful auxiliary gasoline engine. A continuous fire of gun and rifle shots was coming from the submarine's crew now and the bullets bit into the solid woodwork of the rails and houses and scattered splinters over the crouching fishermen. The shells went whistling over the vessel, but in the gathering darkness, with the target rapidly approaching and bows on, the German gunners were shooting wild.

A rifle bullet knocked the skipper's cap off and plowed a furrow across his scalp. The blood poured down his face and he dropped down by the wheel.

"Head her for dat turret amidships," he growled, dashing the blood out of his eyes with his great fist.

Morrissey and Anson knelt by the wheel and glanced over the bows to where the submarine lay. It was only fifty yards away now and the fire was slacking off. The submarine's crew were preparing for an abandonment of their craft and were buckling on life-belts ready for a swim to the three-mast schooner which was rapidly coming up.

"Stand by!" yelled some one.

The fishermen leaped to their feet with a wild whoop and hurled belaying-pins, coal, pieces of wood and other missiles at the German sailors, as with a staggering crash the schooner rammed the U-boat amidships.

The force of the blow rolled the great cigar-shaped hull over. A few of the Germans were knocked into the sea; others hung to the hand-rails and opened fire with automatic revolvers, and two made a leap for the schooner's bobstays and scrambled aboard, only to be laid out by windlass bars in the hands of the maddened fishermen.

With her engine still going ahead and her bow rammed against the submarine's turret, the *Leona* held the underwater craft over on her side. Some of the crew remained hanging to the hand-rails, firing with revolvers at the black bulk of the fishing-vessel, but as it was dark, the shooting was largely pot-luck shots. On the *Leona*, the gang kept up a continuous bombardment with whatever missiles they could lay their hands on, and dory water-jars burst like shrapnel on the iron decks of the U-boat.

"More ammunition!" yelled Morrissey, and the cook jumped below and threw his pots and pans up through the splintered forecastle hatch.

The top-sail schooner had come up within a hundred yards by now and was launching her dories.

"Look, Skip!" cried Dexter Anson. "There's eight dories full o' men acomin' for us. I cal'late you'd better reverse that engine an' git out o' this."

Himmelman grasped the clutch and hauled it over. The motor, which had been going continuously, gave a few explosions and stopped.

"Jump below, Billy, and give her a crank!" cried the Skipper, anxiously peering into the darkness.

The fisherman who had charge of the engine, jumped below and almost as quickly appeared again.

"The gasoline tank's punctured!" he cried in alarm.

"De——, ye say! Yiminy! We're done for! Git ready, fellers, to fight for yer lives!"

As he spoke, Billy the engineer ripped out an oath and clapped his hand to his left shoulder.

"Jumpin' Jupiter! I'm hit!"

From all around them in the darkness came the flash and snap of rifle and revolver fire.

The crouching fishermen on the *Leona Himmelman's* shattered and splintered decks knew that they need expect no mercy from the enraged Germans, and each grasped knife, bar and ax and prepared to sell his life dearly.

* * *

THE operator at Heath Point Signal Station laughed as he received the telephone message from Fox Bay.

"What d'ye think of that?" he said to the other two operators. "Some crazy fishermen have come into Fox Bay, saying they saw a German submarine up on the north shore of the island. Seem quite excited over it and want us to inform a patrol boat or the Government."

The others grinned.

"Wonder where they got the rum? Anyway, you'd better flash it over to that destroyer off here. There's some troopships coming down soon and we'd better send it, even though it's only a fisherman's yarn."

The operator on duty entered the wireless room and sat down to the key. His fingers pressed the dots and dashes denoting the call of the war-vessel somewhere out in the gulf.

The connection was made and the wireless man repeated his message, adding—

"Guess it's a joke!"

The reply rather startled him.

"No joke. Inform Fame Point and all stations within your radius. Most important. We're off. Keep your wire clear for the next twelve hours."

A long slate-colored destroyer slid through the haze off East Cape, with smoke belching from her three funnels. The commander on her bridge talked with his senior lieutenant in excited tones.

"They have done it after all," he said. "We knew they planned getting some of their subs over here, but they caught two of them in the Channel and we thought they'd given up the attempt. Those fishermen are in Fox Bay, so we'll haul in and pick them up."

As they approached the lobster factory settlement, the motor dory with Jack Hanson and Tom Peters aboard rounded up alongside the destroyer. The dory was hoisted aboard, and the two fishermen were escorted to the bridge.

The commander questioned them at once.

"You saw the periscope proceeding in a westerly direction. You also saw a three-masted schooner, presumably a French fisherman, following her. Umph! Up off Cape Observation, you say. All right, men, if your information turns out to be correct, you will have done your country a great service—a great service. Better go below and have something to eat."

"If ye don't mind, sir, we'd rather stay up here an' watch th' fun. Holy sailor! This craft kin travel some. What kin she make, mister?"

"We're running at thirty-two knots an hour now," replied the officer with a smile. "We can make more—thirty-six. Fog's lifting, thank Heaven."

At ten o'clock it was dark and Cape Observation was abeam. The fishermen lounged in the lee of the canvas dodger, while the spray swashed up from the racing bows of the destroyer and the wind of their passage roared overhead in the aerials of the wireless.

A quartermaster, scanning the horizon ahead with binoculars, reported:

"Something firing ahead, sir. Can make out gun flashes!"

"Hands to stations!" ordered the commander, and the wondering trawlers noted the activity which followed the order.

Bluejackets scurried into the gun turret forward, and at the numerous quick-firers along the rail the gun crews hauled the canvas covers off and carried ammunition boxes. Hanson and Peters were anxious.

"Gun flashes ahead," muttered the latter. "Cal'late the boys are inter a scrap with them fellers. Hope we're in time to prevent any killing scrapes."

It was black-dark now and the sky was cloudy and devoid of stars. The destroyer was forging ahead through the gloom at a tremendous speed, her whole fabric trembling to the drive of her powerful engines. The officers peered ahead through their glasses.

"Searchlight!" ordered the commander. The dazzling glare cut into the darkness like a huge sword. "Sweep the horizon!" The great beam of light wheeled and illuminated the deserted scrub-clad cliffs of the Anticosti shore, two miles away, and then methodically described a searching arc from port to starboard.

"There they are!"

The light settled on a strange tableau a mile away on the starboard bow. A fishing-schooner, her masts gone, rolled in the swell alongside the long black hulk of a great submarine. In close proximity was a three-mast topsail schooner lying hove-to, and all around the three craft were dories crowded with men. When the light played on the scene, all the dories with one accord made for the topsail schooner.

"Starboard—two points!" The destroyer's commander, fearing a torpedo from the submarine, swung his ship off suddenly. "Port—two points!"

The destroyer made another wild swing on her course.

"Fire a shot over that schooner!"

A gun thundered below the bridge and the destroyer's whistle shrieked a warning to halt.

"All right. Never mind him. We can catch that fellow any time. We'll come alongside that submarine. Looks as if there was something wrong with him. By Jove! He's making no move. Swing all your guns on him and as soon as I give the word, pump shell into him as hard as you can go."

"By gorry, mister!" ejaculated Hanson, "th' *Leona's* in a whale of a mess! She ain't got a spar standin', an' her decks are all smashed up. Jupiter! Thar ain't no sign o' th' gang."

Fear for their safety gripped his heart.

"They've bin wiped out!" growled Peters ominously. "God, mister, they've bin killed. Thar ain't a man on her decks. We're too late!"

Both fishermen feared the worst, and a slow rage consumed them. Peters grabbed the commander's arm.

"Blow that schooner an' submarine out o' water, sir!" he cried hoarsely. "Give the order to yer men. They've wiped out Johnny Himmelman and the gang!"

The officer rang down for "Stop!" and shook off the fisherman's detaining hand.

"Wait a minute, my man," he said grimly. "We'll investigate. If anything has happened to your friends, they'll be avenged. Two boats and a full boarding-crew, Mr. Jones! Call them away and overhaul that submarine and the fisherman. If he tries any monkey tricks, sheer off and I'll sink him. Nothing to fear from that schooner—she can't get away from us, but look out they don't open fire on you with rifles or concealed guns. Call your men away!"

A boatswain's whistle warbled out and two boats splashed into the water, with the crews swarming down the falls fully armed with cutlasses, rifles and revolvers. Peters and Hanson ran down from the bridge and leaped into the first boat. The oars were shipped and with the steady pull of a well-trained man-o'-war's crew, the two boats headed rapidly in the direction of the helpless fishing-schooner.

Peters and Hanson were the first men over the smashed rails.

"Lord Harry!" cried Peters. "She's all smashed an' ripped to blazes!" He ran to the cabin gangway. "Oh, below! Any one aboard?" Hanson had run for'ard and was hailing down the splintered forecastle.

"Godfrey, Jack, there's nobody aboard!" cried Peters hoarsely. "They've bin murdered and hove overboard! Look at the blood on the wheel-box! Look how th' decks hev bin shot up! God—poor boys! Poor boys!"

They reported to the officer in the boat.

"Nobody aboard, sir. Th' boys hev bin murdered an' thrown over th' side by them murderin' devils. Seventeen o' them, sir! As fine a gang as ever hauled a trawl or stood a trick——"

"Jump in, m'lads, and we'll overhaul this submarine," said the officer kindly. "She's making no move, and I'm thinking she's disabled in some way. We'll get her crew and they'll pay the price, never fear!"

Illuminated in the glare of the destroyer's searchlights, the boats pulled for the submarine, which rested motionless on the water, with her conning-tower and decks just awash. A fisherman's small trawl-anchor bent to a stout line which led to the *Leona* was fluked in the handrail.

"Now, lads, board her!" shouted the lieutenant, as the boats ranged alongside the great steel hull.

The bowmen hooked in with the boat-hooks, and the bare-footed bluejackets, with cutlasses and revolvers drawn, swarmed out on the submersible's decks. The conning-tower hatch was down and the lieutenant banged on it with the butt of his sword.

"Open up and surrender!" he roared.

The hatch opened slowly and a voice answered.

"All right, mister! Der blasted hatch was hard to open. Yiminy! You was a long time coming."

Out of the hatch appeared a haggard face with a blood-stained bandage around it.

"Johnny Himmelman!" howled both the fishermen at once.

The lieutenant and the bluejackets stared in surprise as the two trawlers grabbed the skipper and helped him down on the submersible's decks.

"How in th' name o' Moses did you git in there? Where's th' gang?"

The gang were coming. The whole seventeen of them came crawling out of the U-boat's conning-tower, and the naval men gaped at them open-mouthed.

"Where the dickens is the crew of this craft?" stuttered the lieutenant of Himmelman.

The skipper waved toward the topsail schooner lying to the wind a cable's length away.

"Aboard her, I cal'late, or in der drink, maybe!" he answered nonchalantly. To Peters and Hanson he remarked: "Boys, oh, boys, but you've missed all der fun. What a session we've had, to be sure!"

The officer looked over the assembly of rugged fishermen—cut, bleeding and bruised. He noted their daredevil faces and their powerfully muscled arms.

"By Jove!" he murmured. "What devils they are, those Bank fishermen! What boys they'd make for the navy! Eh, what?"

THE war is still on and the censorship is strict. The fate of the submarine, the topsail schooner and her crew, are known only to the naval authorities. Our story deals only with Captain Himmelman and the *Leona Himmelman's* gang.

Captain Johnny was speaking.

"Yes, sir," he was saying, "when we saw de dories comin' for us from dat schooner an' bangin' away at us mit rifles, I says, 'We'll have to git out!' De *Leona* had drifted a few feet off from de submarine, so we hooked her mit a trawl-anchor and a bit o' line and den we hauled de *Leona* up on it.

"De whole gang of us scrambled out on der bowsplit and yumped aboard der submarine and got into her and closed de hatch yust as dey rushed us. We were all right den—yust as safe as a lobster in a can; and we stayed dere ontil de man-o'-war come up. Now, mister, I want to know if der Government is goin' to pay for de damage to my schooner."

The destroyer's commander smiled and stretched forth his hand.

"Captain Himmelman," he said with admiration in his voice, "we've heard of nervy deeds done in this great war, but I must say that there is little I have heard that can beat the exploits of you and your daring crew. You recklessly braved death a dozen times; you have shown a truly marvelous ingenuity in capturing this submarine, her crew, and that treacherous Portuguese schooner; you have also been the means of averting a great peril to the flotilla of transports coming down the gulf this week.

I haven't the least hesitation in stating that when I have made my report to the authorities, you and your men will be fully compensated and rewarded for the work you have done and the dangers you have faced. Allow me to shake hands with you and your brave boys. By Godfrey! I'm proud to know you!"

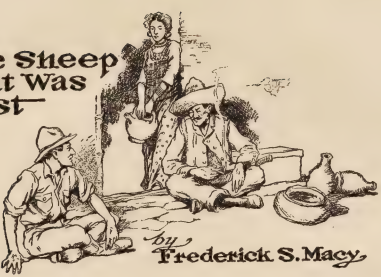
Some months later Captain Himmelman proudly exhibited a medal to the visiting mayor of Anchorville and members of the town council.

"Yes, sir, me an' Tommy Morrissey an' Dexter Anson got one of dem things mit a letter from King George himself. Dey call it de 'Distinguished Service Order,' an' I cal'late I'll hev it made into a brooch for de ol' woman. De *Leona* is bein' refitted at de expense of de government, and de whole gang got a check from dem, so I cal'late we ain't lost much. I ain't a highliner this season, but we've got one thing to brag about when it comes to fishin'."

"What's that, Captain?"

"We're de only gang dat ever jigged a submarine—an' mit de starb'd anchor for a hook. Ha! Ha!" And Captain Himmelman chuckled.

The One Sheep That Was Lost



by Frederick S. Macy

WHENCE Paddy came or what his past had been are matters of no consequence. It is enough that the Potter had fashioned him crudely and then had cast him into the stream to drift as he might. And the goddess of chance, in some caprice, had kept the frail jar floating, holding its rim just a little above the threatening surface.

So Paddy, circling about in the buffeting eddies of human experience, was carried to San Francisco, in the days when thousands of troops set forth in great white ships to civilize the Philippine Islands. There, waif and wanderer, he followed the crowds, earned a meal when he could, and cheered, on occasions, as lustily as many a happier sportsman.

At last, impelled by a lofty motive, perhaps, but influenced most, I fear, by the seductive odor of hot "slum," sniffed in the tented camps—for his belt was very loose—he stopped, one day, before a white-haired sergeant who stood in an office-doorway, and pulled off his battered hat.

"Want to take on?" the sergeant asked.

"Wot's *that?*" countered Paddy warily.

"Want to enlist?"

"Oh! I was thinkin' of ut," confessed the wanderer.

The trained old non-com looked sharply into the large eyes before him and divined, among other things, a cunning brain behind them. As for Paddy, he read the sergeant's mind and the sergeant knew it. Then both, in perfect understanding, grinned as two who had seen the world, and the old man said—

"Come in."

This is a part of the record signed by the major upstairs:

Nativity, American. *Height*, 67 inches. *Age*, 23 1-12. *Weight*, 132 pounds. *Occupation*, track-walker. (Whereat the major had smiled and the sergeant had glared most soberly at the ceiling.) *Figure*, thin but muscular. *Hair*, red. *Eyes*, light blue. *Complexion*, pale. *Indelible marks*, ears very prominent; face badly freckled.

"My boy," said the major when the examination was over, "you're a bum and we don't want bums. But you have a keen head and a good heart. You don't know much, but you can learn. You've seen hard times, but there is something around that big mouth of yours that tells me you'd rather give away all you had than steal from others. Your eyes are wide awake and shrewd, but you'd rather be honest than crooked. If you study hard and work hard you can go as high in the service as you like. I'll take you on. Hold up your right hand."

And that is how Paddy, at last, began a definite career and a great adventure, in the course of which he committed a military sin, fought for his life with his wits, out-Malayed the Malay, rendered his country a service and ruined the plans of scores of others, but emerged unscathed himself.

ALL this occurred eight hundred miles from Manila, far in the south, in the Visayan town of Sogod. At that time it was scarcely more than a large church adjacent to a great *convento* or parish house, both built of soft, white blocks of coral rock and set in a wide, green *plaza*. The dusky inhabitants, who were short in stature but big in treachery and the art of deceit, dwelt in a few narrow streets of bamboo huts.

Behind this low, brown settlement, green hills lifted the many-fingered jungle high against the sky; and before it spread the twinkling, steaming sea, white-hot in the shadowless glare, lapping lifelessly the narrow beach just beyond a fringe of coconut trees. All was very beautiful and very still, save for the occasional calling of women, the squeaking of a carabao cart, or, at night, the wild ululations of fishermen with red, flaring torches raised in their hands, who squatted monkey-like upon the upcurved prows of their swiftly flitting dug-outs.

Yet there was menace in the prospect, and death brooded in the quiet. In the *convento* were a company of American soldiers, in the mountains a horde of outlaws. The outward fairness and tranquillity were but a screen that hid a gulf of barbarism as wide and deep as the shimmering, sleepy ocean.

As for the villagers, they sent food and taxes to the guerillas, which entirely satisfied those Christian murderers, then told the white men where the bandits were and craftily led their hike astray. But they took care always that a few old weapons were found or that a personal enemy of the guide was captured to color the deception. And when the troops toiled back into the dun, palm-shaded village, red-eyed, maddened with heat, desperate with blackening thirst and the hopelessness of the chase, a rabble of anxiously solicitous natives flanked them and welcomed them with voluble commiseration.

"How sad," they exclaimed, "that the brave *soldados* have labored so long in vain!"

Yet, they thought, is the loot of my brother or my uncle or my cousin or my father, who is supposed to be dead, or my wife's sweetheart still where I can find it?

"How unutterable that the unspeakables in the mountains have again escaped!"

Yet, they argued, how fortunate it is for us that these stupid pigs do not know that the colonels or the generals are even now at cards with the *padre* and perhaps will dine today with the *Americanos* themselves.

Also the old men hobbled along, wagging their apish heads in seeming pity. Women stood in the door-holes of the thatches, silent, indifferent, or glided slipperless across the bamboo floors to peer, like cows, above the sills of the window spaces. And everywhere, in the arms of the people or pressed into gaps among them, were star-eyed, smiling children, suns of hope in a sullen universe of malice, still pure as the fruit of the trees. They laughed with the careless joy of babyhood. Their elders leered inanely, since they knew the value of a mask.

Men can not stand this sort of existence indefinitely. At the end of a year the lack of amusement, the frightful monotony, the unrelenting climate and the extreme discouragement that depressed the garrison had driven many of them close to madness.

Some bore on grimly, waiting for that vague day when they should be delivered. Others sought refuge in vice, and a few died.

The captain, the lieutenant and the surgeon lived in a roomy shack across the plaza. Life for them was even harder; for anxiety, official responsibility and the burdens of administration were added to their other cares. Paddy was not the least of their troubles. But they were as lenient with him as the necessities of discipline allowed, considering the circumstances under which they lived.

There came a time, however, when Lieutenant Bryant appeared for breakfast one morning in a mood that said, as plainly as words, that his patience was exhausted.

"Had to put Private Ruff in confinement last night," he explained. "Howling drunk again in spite of his promises."

"Ruff?" queried the captain.

"He's that red-headed, big-eared, fly-specked little devil with the innocent, baby-blue eyes. The men call him 'Paddy.' "

"Oh, yes! That's four times in a year. I'm afraid we shall have to put him before a general court pretty soon, unless the *medico* can cure him. How about it, Scotty? What's the psychology of it?" With a wink at Bryant.

The doctor, a middle-aged contract

surgeon, was, in many respects, an odd mixture of the Old World and the New. His real name was Maclaren.

"Well," he drawled as he slowly stirred his coffee, "I'm no Keeley-cure man and it seems to me I've had the beggar on my hands before. From what I recollect, I think I don't want him again. But as for the analysis of his case, I'm thinking it's very simple. He spends his leisure in the native shacks, a-wandering from one to t'other, according to fancy. And when he finds congenial surroundings—and he has good taste in judging the looks of a brown lass—he thrones himself on a rice-mat and gets bacchantic.

"Mind ye, I'm not condoning the offense, but it might be he's lonesome. And he has a deal of thirst and curiosity, which he's experimented with for a year till both are torrid in intensitee. Incidentally he has learned to talk Visayan in all its classic beauty, howbeit he did acquire a degraded dialect of his own language in the stews of his native land. Consequently——"

"Hold on, Scotty! Hold on!" laughed the captain. "That's enough. What you're driving at is that he's nothing but a common drunk, but that he may be useful on account of his knowledge of the local customs and this cog-and-ratchet language. Hence, mercy. All right. We'll let it go at that. But there are some other things he will have to learn, too."

That was all until the next day. Then, about noon, a sentry tapped on the *sala* door.

"Prisoner Ruff, sir, wants to talk to the captain."

"What is it about?"

"Don't know, sir; says it's private."

"H'm! Send him in."

Very humbly, very respectfully, came Paddy before his commander, who looked at him a moment silently but not unkindly.

"What is it, Ruff?"

"I want permission, sir, to go on the hike tonight."

"What do you know about a hike tonight?"

"I only heard some talk about it."

"You're a prisoner, Ruff."

"Yes, sir."

"What do you think I could do with you on a hike? Do you think I could spare any men to nurse you into staying sober? You're a shame to your company! It's bad enough to have you in garrison where other men have to do your work for you while you lie drunk in the guard-house. But on a hike! I can't do it, Ruff, you'd give out. You're no good."

"That's just it, sir," replied the prisoner after a pause. "I ain't no good. I never was no good. An' it's a cinch I ain't doin' no good locked up in the mill."

"That's the point, Ruff, exactly."

"I've told myself all you've just told me, sir, an' a whole lot more. That's why I wanted to see the captain, sir. I ain't no groveler nor lookin' fer no bootlick. But I've cut it out, sir. I want to get out o' the mill. I want to go on this hike, sir, an' I want to make good. S'help me, captain, I'm goin' to soldier an' I'm goin' to do it right!"

The doctor, most gracious of men, cleared his throat suggestively, almost pleadingly; and a twinkle lighted the captain's eyes.

"Well, Ruff," he said, "I've heard that sort of talk a good many times before, and it usually only means a bad case of remorse that passes off altogether too soon. However, I'll give you one chance more, but only one. That's all; you'll be released later.

"Well, Scotty, what's the psychology of it now? How long will he last?"

" 'Bout two weeks, mebbe. It's hard to make a deceesion. But the leetle rascal makes a strong appeal to the paternal instinct."

THE bay was red and purple with the glow of the setting sun, and the tiny islands far off on the horizon rose above the sea line, green and blue and pink, curling their edges up toward the painted clouds, when "D" Company once more marched quietly into the jungle. Paddy was with them, vowing to make good; but the moon sneered at him through the rattling canes, the huge palms whetted their fronds derisively against one another, and the breezes laughed in the leaves. Everything mocked him.

But he plodded cheerfully and optimistically on in his proper place, and all went well for three days. Then, in the evening, he was tortured with a frightful thirst. It was not *vino* he wanted, though, it was water.

They were bivouacked upon the summit of a ridge; their haversacks for pillows, banana-leaves for beds, the moonlight for cover, and rustling fans to whisper dreams. The brain-fevering day had yielded to the cool night; and as the voices in the shadows timidly ventured forth they slept.

Only Paddy and the guard were still awake; the one because none knew in what form death might be crawling upon them from the valley, the other because his mouth burned and his tongue was stiff from the torment he suffered.

He scooped a hole to accommodate his hip and so made his earthy bed more comfortable. Then he stuffed his hat beneath the small of his back and thus eased and shifted his aching body. But no device he could invent brought either rest or forgetfulness.

Later he prowled about among his fellows and examined their canteens. They were empty. By the embers of the cook's fire was a huge can of boiled water, but it was still scalding hot. It would not be cool for many hours. Yet he filled his tin cup from it and lay down again to wait until it should be cold enough to drink. Then, somewhere in the darkness below, a dog howled, though the tom-toms that had warned the country of their approach were long since hushed.

"Wot's that?" he wondered. "Some one comin'?"

The sentry paused in his monotonous round, listening; and Paddy remained motionless, gazing steadily into the black void beneath. Suddenly even that seemed to fade as he looked into it. He lost all sense of everything. Thirst, the dog, danger and the hardness of the ground became of no moment. He was asleep and dreamed that he was immersed in a great lake, clear and comforting. He drank until he could hold no more, but yet he was unsatisfied. Presently a monstrous beast came down to the shore and wallowed, then changed to a spreading sheet of flame so that the whole surface boiled. He strangled, for he had drank the fire and it seethed in his throat.

He sat up choking and reached for his cup. Either he or the man on post had knocked it over while he slept.

"I've simply got to have ut," he groaned, "or something."

The barking had stopped, but a point of light flickered far down the hillside. He had not noticed it before. Then it disappeared.

"I'm goin' after 't. S'help me, I got to do ut! I can't stand ut no more!"

He slid noiselessly into the underbrush. Alert, and with the utmost caution, he groped his way toward where the gleam had been. Soon he came into a clearing and there he discovered a well-made hut. Through the raised flap that marked the front he saw a young woman within, seated upon her heels, sorting metal buttons by the aid of a feeble flame that danced in a glass of coconut-oil.

Without the least sign of surprise or any other emotion, she paused in her work and stared at him appraisingly.

"On watch," concluded Paddy, "an' sortin' out buttons fer makin' the ends o' tin-can cartridges."

"*'Sus Maria!*" she exclaimed at last.

"*Tubig!*" he whispered.

The woman arose softly and brought him a drink in a dripping coconut-shell from a jar that stood near the window-gap. He called for more.

"*Vino? Anisette?*" she suggested cunningly.

Paddy was not insensible of a warning that welled up within him, but he was optimistic. Besides, one glass wouldn't hurt him, he argued, and he needed it, or thought he did, which is the same thing to those who wish it to be. So he sinned again, for the last time.

It was late the next afternoon when he awoke. The woman was smoking a cigar contentedly, apparently unaware even of his presence. She was huddled upon the floor fussing with a little fire in a box of earth, beside which was a pot of rice ready for the cooking.

But there were now other visitors; for two barefooted, slippered men crouched in a corner, whose enormous, straw hats were inscribed "*Zona* 16," in big, red characters. On the shoulders of their loose, white coats were red straps burdened with tin insignia; and along the seams of their baggy trousers, red, flannel stripes. Their buttons were small and brassy, each crudely embossed with a single star.

"Two gu-gu generals," noted Paddy, stricken immovable.

Little by little the memory of the night before came out of the dark fog in the back of his mind. The details of the present became vivid and real, and he wondered what time it was. Then he realized that if his company were near, these two rascals in the corner would not be sitting there. Evidently the captain had given up searching for him or had gone in the wrong direction, which was more probable. A shudder trickled down his spine like a drop of cold water.

"I sure am up against it this time for fair!" he sighed to himself.

The woman set the pot of rice upon the fire, and brought cigarettes for the generals. It was plain that they had not been there long, for as they smoked she described the manner of Paddy's coming.

Said one, a surly, ill-natured brute not good to look upon—

"He is, no doubt, a Mason and a heretic."

The other raised his palms, shook his head and was grave.

"What shall we do with him?" asked this one with a deprecatory little smile.

The first shrugged indifferently.

"We can not be bothered with prisoners," he declared tonelessly.

The second bowed submissively.

"True," he agreed. "But who knows? We may use him."

"Then, at least, since he has awakened, I will secure him. Woman, fetch me a cord!"

But Paddy had no wish to be bound.

"There's only wan way out," thought he. "I'll have t' join 'em."

He arose leisurely, feigning unconcern. Then, leaning back against the wall, his hands in his pockets and his sodden blue eyes looking from one to the other, he spoke to them in their own tongue, "in all its classic beauty," augmented as it is with borrowed Spanish.

"Listen!" he bade them. "The woman has told you I came alone, of my own will. Therefore I claim your confidence. Do I not know the *Americanos* are even now searching for me? They will not find me. They keep to the trails, for they are stupid. I was here within call when they lay on the crest above us, yet they did not overtake me. Do I not know you have eyes in every bamboo, that I could not go along a dozen *barras* or cry for help, and live? I could not leave if I would. You will not bind me. And there is more. I have something to say to Pachico."

Exactly what he had to communicate was not at all clear, however, even to himself.

The ill-tempered one seemed about to speak, but the mild one checked him with a sign.

"What is this you have to say to Pachico?" he asked.

"There will be great honor for you both if he knows. Surely it would be unfortunate if one with a secret should be hindered or fail to arrive. Pachico would hear of it. He would be offended. I can not tell, now."

Over the face of the surly one spread a look that none who knows the native can mistake. As the woman glided soundlessly out, he sprang to his feet, cat-like, his naked bolo quivering in his grasp.

"Shall I let this spotted-faced white man, with hair like hemp and eyes like water, defy me?"

The merciful one said gently—

"Wait, my friend, till tomorrow."

"Now!"

"Certainly," he said. "But why are you unwilling that he should speak only with Pachico? Is it because you would know his business for yourself?"

The rabid one settled upon his heels like one who is felled, his face inscrutable. But he of the deprecatory little smile seemed not to notice.

Paddy sat down, cross-legged, upon the floor.

"Phew!" he breathed softly to himself. "Pretty close! I wasn't lookin' fer that, neither. I see how ut is. Not extry good friends. Got him that time; Softy did, too."

His brow was damp but he dared not wipe it. This was no time to show weakness. But he said no more; for to take advantage of a point secured, even to signify perception of the fact, might pique the pride of even the mild one. Then he would surely die. But his wits were busy, exceedingly busy, and he wrenched them free from the grip of the liquor to evolve some plan for escape.

Night was descending, and soon the woman returned, puffing her vile weed. She cast but a glance at Paddy, and though it may have surprised her to see him living, she did not show it. She brought the supper from the fire, and the placid one invited him to eat.

"Tomorrow," he said, "you shall report to Pachico."

"It is better tonight," replied Paddy, not too insistently, "since it might occur that I should be bitten by a snake or die of air in the heart while I sleep. Can you not, *amigo*," he addressed the sullen one, "despatch me to Pachico?"

But the brute refused to be conciliated. "I can not."

"Good! Men of our superiority should not be disturbed. Pardon! You are right. But there are always the mere *soldados*. Surely we can send a message?"

He of the little smile was obviously interested and studied the American intently, even admiringly. Paddy had guessed a situation between these two, a possibility, and was striving for the facts.

"I have no soldiers!" blurted the bloodthirsty one, a general caught unawares because he despised his enemy. Then he saw the trap and grew turgid with rage.

The gentle one laughed a very little, almost with contempt, and shrugged his shoulders. But he eyed his companion like a lynx, not once relaxing his watchfulness, while he spoke to Paddy.

"You have great intelligence, *amigo*," he said. "I will tell you something. Our friend, here, is a famous general. But he does nothing for Pachico and much for himself. For that the chief will give him no men."

"*Diablo!*" exclaimed the other, appalled.

"What importance if I tell this man," demanded the calm one softly, but tense, on guard, as he pretended to misunderstand, "since you kill him tomorrow?"

He spoke again to Paddy.

"Indeed, a few of my friends desire that he should soon succeed Pachico."

Over the pot of rice the hand of the other hovered, trembling. The woman was lighting the wick in the glass of oil; and as it weakly came to life, Paddy shivered. He was chilled, like one who waits a promised specter or dreads momentarily its cold touch in the darkness. But he understood, now, or at least appreciated the certainty of what impended.

As if an intuition forced his speech, like pledging allegiance he asked—

"But you have many other friends?"

"Very many, *amigo*," the cool one answered, "you are quick to understand."

The sullen one ate of the food in his palm, then stood. He did not even reach for his weapon, for the tranquil one was clearly ready. He looked at the woman, whose back was toward him as she tinkered at the fire; at Paddy, oppressed like a watcher who does not look up in the dark hour of another; and then at his wily, tigerish foe, who, Judas-like, had dipped with him into the pot of rice and now attentively enjoyed the agony of his prey. At last he went mutely to the door; stared long into the blackness, and left them.

He at the rice arose and stepped to the window. Upon the sill he set the feeble, flickering flame the woman had provided, and remained there a moment. Then he returned with it, a smile on his face and something in his eyes that turned the heart to stone.

"For this I brought him here," was all he said.

Paddy turned away that the creature might not read his face.

"*Hola! Americano!* There was mastery now in the voice, not craft, and Paddy recognized it.

"Tell me your business. I, myself, am Pachico! Will you have proof?"

"It is enough." Then, desperately but with head erect, he uttered whatever his misery prompted.

"I came here, as I and the woman have said, of my own desire. I have foresworn the *Americanos*. Four times have they put me in their prison. Seven months have I spent there."

The listener's accursed features reflected no thought, no emotion. But his cunning understanding would clutch the slightest flaw, and miss not a single word, though it spelt life or death for Paddy Ruff.

"I must speak truth," hummed in the pleader's thoughts, so he lied with the facts.

"I have no love for their cells nor they for me. When I go back it must be with your people or I shall not return. I have a scheme for effecting this, and I will destroy my enemies."

The other looked evilly upon him, suspiciously, treacherously, as was to be expected.

"Listen! I know what has passed here. He who has gone out will not come back. The lamp in the window showed no more than a candle among the trees, but it shone on a long journey. You have many friends. They saw, and read it for a signal, since it was for that you brought him here. So will it be with me, too, if I displease you. Is it not so? Therefore I shall obey your commands."

"You have spoken of a way to go back as one of us, to the camp of the *Americanos*. What is it?"

"Wot'll I say? Wot'll I say?" implored Paddy of himself.

He lurched to his feet and walked slowly to the water-jar. As he drank he imagined he could feel the other's gaze upon him. Up from his mud-stiffened canvas leggings, over khaki breeches and dark, blue-flannel shirt it burned, till it scorched his pallid face. Then an idea came; not quite formed, indeed, yet outlined clearly enough for the present.

He turned back quickly to Pachico and smiled at him confidingly. Whenever he smiled, his red head seemed like a sun of goodwill and his eyes like wells of trust.

"I will show you how to take the rifles of the *Americanos* and all their stores; the big chests of salmon, of meats, of cartridges, of shoes, of clothing and of money that are piled high in their *cuartel;* and you can not fail."

The cupidity, the lust of power and of blood that burned in the monster's breast flamed into his cheeks. He let himself anticipate, for a moment, what all this meant to him. As for the white stranger, who had too much intelligence, he should certainly make no trouble when he ceased to be useful. No chances must be taken with such as he. The little smile played significantly upon his lips.

"And you, my friend," he insinuated almost effectionately, "how shall I then honor you?"

But Paddy had not sat upon the mats of Sogod so many times in vain.

"It is true, of course," he said, "that I have a motive and something to gain. But I want neither riches nor authority. I ask not even that you give me back my rifle, or that you promise me pay. I shall be content if I am never more imprisoned. I am doing this for what they have done to me. It is for hate, nothing more. Let us dismiss the woman so that I may show you how it can be done."

She was reclining upon the floor, dozing contentedly.

"Go you to Dolores!" commanded Pachico. "Tell my generals that I return to-morrow. Say nothing of this man. The General Miguel, so you shall say, is watching the expedition of the *Americanos*. You comprehend?"

"*Señor!*" she mumbled, and slipped away into the gloom.

"It is thus," continued Paddy. "We will send a letter to their thick-headed captain and proffer our surrender and that of all our army. We will write that upon a stated day, let us say the fourth from the letter, we shall be upon the *plaza* of Malavista. There we will lay down our arms. He will come with his whole army, surely all but a few, for he knows we are many, so that there may be a splendid ceremony. But we shall not be there.

"He will march with a loud noise of canteen and bayonet by the easy trail, for that is the way they do. We will go by the long route to Sogod, and we must be there when the enemy leave. When we can no longer hear the dogs bark at their coming, then we will run to the storehouse. The guard must flee or die. There I will indicate what is filled and what is empty, where are the cases of arms and where the money, so that we can quickly retreat to the mountains.

"On the way we will destroy them from the summits above the road, in a place from which there is no escape, with their own rifles. I shall secure my vengeance, and you may give me what else you will. I shall be content and you shall be master."

"But our troops have tried such strategy before," objected Pachico, "and the *Americanos* have always eluded us or done some queer thing that none but pigs would think of."

"It is for this reason," explained Paddy. "You do not know their ways nor their manner of fighting. For example, has it not happened, when you have rushed upon them with the bolo so quickly they could not use their guns, that they have thrown these down and beaten your men with their fists? If you had known, you could have prevented this and killed them all when often you destroyed but a few. Yet your soldiers are brave as any in all the world.

"Let us take a short time and first teach the army how those people fight and what their tactics are. Also, when we strike, I can tell you from the signs about the barracks what is their design when they depart. Thus there will be no error, since we shall know as much as they, and we can not lose."

"I will think of this," Pachico said. "To-morrow I will hold a council. Let us sleep."

"A cigarette, I beg of you."

"You have it," the general answered, producing a package hastily and graciously, as might an Oriental prince for an honored guest.

UPON the following morning they set out to join the army. This consisted of seven generals subordinate to Pachico, many colonels, and a progressively increasing number of lieutenant-colonels, majors, captains and lieutenants. In all there were about two hundred; but the predominance of officers was of slight consideration, since there was little semblance of organization. Rank merely determined the share of pillage each received.

The day was well advanced when Paddy was led before the owners of this *opera bouffe*, and they glared at him exultingly, a real American captive, as they lolled beneath the coco-palms and idled the steaming hours away with *monte* and cigarettes.

It was not proper that officers such as they should sit with those of lower grade, for those were only fighters, and generals have greater things to do. So, farther back in the shady grove, the majors, the captains and the subalterns loafed and gambled like their betters, except that the stakes were smaller; while here and there was only a *soldado*, a link in the chain that signaled news across the island by tom-tom, fire and sturdy runner, or watched the trails from a perch in the miry rice-fields or the top of a swinging tree.

The generals scowled at Paddy; and then, since their lord was silent, they turned again to bet on the ace of *bastos*. But when they had tired of the game or the bankers had won their all, Pachico called them to him when the *siesta* hour had come and gone, and told them, in flowery words, the history and the offer of the intelligent American.

"What is the name of this foreigner?" croaked an ancient whose lineaments were seamed like a monkey's.

"It is one not hard to pronounce," replied the chief. "It is Paddy R-ruff."

"Are you that Paddy," another asked, "who visits so much with our people of Sogod?"

"I am," admitted he, seating himself on the grass among them.

"It is as I thought. He is that one of whom the priest has spoken. I, myself, have often seen him in the *tiendas*, drinking."

"And I also," said the old man. "We know of him favorably. We have even talked with him in Sogod."

But another spoke more cautiously.

"It is well planned," conceded he, "but how are we to know that the infidels will leave the doors unlocked?"

"It is thus," submitted Paddy. "They think the guard sufficient. They have never turned the locks, for the doors are heavy and hard to close. Yet, if they do, I know where the keys are hung."

"But they may not go out," another objected.

"That we can see from the heights. But they will, for the captain will desire the great glory of this surrender."

"And our friend the *Americano*, what does he desire?" one other asked. "Shall he have a command?"

"As the council wish," replied Paddy, raising his palms and shrugging. "But I am content to be simply a drill-master; or, better still, our leader's minister of war. Otherwise, some captain might be jealous that one so newly come should be so soon promoted, and an accident to me might then deprive you of your victory."

He had no mind to follow a certain Miguel recently suspected of ambition, yet he desired to hold some sort of dignified position that he might not be slain in mere contempt.

To have a minister of war was pleasing to them, for they had heard of such an officer who, in Spain, was a grand man. But to none had it ever been related that he held a post in battle, nor was there any precedent by which to establish his share of spoils.

Therefore, until now, no one had wished a place among them so void of either glory or remuneration, even though it doubtlessly commanded high respect. Consequently, if the white man, who craved no fame and coveted no profit, since the *Americanos* are all rich, would be satisfied with a portfolio, it was excellent, they agreed, that the commander should have him upon his staff. And Pachico, who had said no word throughout the council, approved, since it was in his thoughts to do this very thing.

"Then let us begin at once. And if, tomorrow, you will give me pens, ink and paper, I will write a manual of drill for all the captains, whom I, myself, will instruct in it."

A trifle dubiously they acquiesced, and from that time on, the order of their days was drill.

They raided helpless villages no more, nor burned nor looted. Only they still exacted tribute of money, provisions and cloth, since these were necessary. They made their quarters, for greater comfort, in a *barrio* of Dolores, where Paddy was given a shack to himself, as became a minister of war, in which were a bamboo bed, a chair, and a small, rectangular table.

They posted guards on the paths and the hilltops, and lookouts watched by day and by night to see that nothing disturbed the generals, and, especially, the minister of war. He was assigned, also, a captain for aide, to fetch and to carry; for it was better, they said, that he, a white man, should not be exposed too much to the sun by day or the jungle mists at night.

He thanked them very heartily, pretending not to understand; and hour after hour spread out a kind of "school of the company" on many sheets of paper.

But he trained them and wrote for them during all those wearying sittings not to make soldiers of the ruffians, but to gain time and to win their confidence. The success of the plan that had suggested itself so hazily at first, required not only the faith of his captors but also the cooperation of his countrymen. For that reason he had proposed the letter of surrender, which, he intended, should be solely a device to carry a message of his own.

The great difficulty was to write one communication within another in such a way as to be detected by his captain but not by the *insurrectos*.

As he labored at his little table over the lessons for his masters, this problem formed his principle study. He considered and rejected various schemes. Eventually he remembered that "Big Bill" Schindel and "Teaser" Ritter had plotted most reprehensible things under the very noses of the police, with the help of an invisible ink compounded of onion-juice mixed with milk and water. The knowledge had nearly cost him dear, for he had carried some of the missives before the double nature of the correspondence had been discovered. He decided that it would be easy to apprise the captain of the two-fold structure of the letter, and concerned himself with securing the ingredients.

To this end he shivered one day as he stood on the parade with Pachico, watching the drill. The fellow expressed anxiety.

"It is nothing," Paddy explained, casting a woful look at the skies as he hunched his shoulders and chattered his teeth. "The night-dews give me rigors at times, which stay in my bones till the sun brings them out. If only I had onions and the milk that is sold in cans, I should never be troubled; or so, at least, it was when I lay in the jail of Sogod."

"'Sus!" exclaimed Pachico. "If that is all, you shall have them. I will ask the *padre* in Sogod for onions, which he can procure from the heretics there; for they are on excellent terms, as you know. And, as for the milk in cans, the Spaniard here in Dolores shall furnish all you require."

Indeed, these remarkable essentials to a cure were not long in arriving; and though there is no explanation of the fact, either empiric or rational, yet it is undeniable that when they had been received Paddy quaked no more. He also took pains to write, each day, only as much as could be learned upon the next; for he knew they would soon lose patience, and he felt that a manuscript repudiated would confess the looseness of his hold upon them.

As a matter of fact, in about three weeks the steps began to lag, the hands to slouch and their enthusiasm to cool perceptibly. Paddy went at once to Pachico, whose zeal was waning like his men's.

"I come to you," he said, "as your minister of war, to announce that the army is prepared."

"It is well," approved the general, more cordial than he had been for some time before. "Also I am sensible of much improvement in their art. Tonight I will consult the council."

Paddy returned to his shack and stretched himself upon the bamboo bed. His aide sprawled upon a rice-mat under the window-hole, asleep.

But the unhappy prisoner took no heed of him. The moment had come when he must make the last move between himself and his own kind. It was only a little way, but if he fell there would be none to raise him.

He was afraid. So cunningly had he plotted, so skilfully had he dissembled, so severe had been the strain, that the very prospect of fulfilment conjured up doubts and called forth terrors from his imagination. Reaction like this was inevitable. In an uncertain way he knew it and that the mood would pass. Yet he had baited a trap with a massacre, to lure devils, and wagered his life on an untried gin.

"But they'll kill me anyhow," he reasoned in his own poor dialect, "an' I got t' do ut. It's a chanst."

"Four-flushin' I am," he continued in silent deliberation, "an' if any one calls me, I'm gone. Cut off me hands an' me feet, mebbe, an' bury me t' the neck in a hill of ants."

THE *siesta* hour was over. His assistant stirred, then awoke, and seated himself in the doorway, smoking, looking out at nothing. But Paddy remained where he was, his hands behind his ruddy, unkempt head, his ankles crossed in an attitude of ease, his blue eyes dim with worry, trying to predict and to provide against such difficulties as he had not yet foreseen. In the meantime, one by one, the minutes fluttered by and night slowly advanced upon them.

The rice-pots were steaming and the army clustered round them, while the yellows, the greens and the pinks of sunset dulled to a copper glow. He heard the evening babble; sometimes a deep-chested grunt, or a shrill, falsetto argument that invariably ended in a high-pitched, even-toned, long-breathed "*ah-h-h*" that meant contempt, derision or a challenge, as one chose. There were laughter and muttering.

The native went out for the eight-o'clock meal. Paddy forsook his couch, with sweating palms and chill brow, to explore the gaps in the nipa walls for spying eyes. Then, with trembling fingers, he lighted his primitive lamp, tiptoed softly with it to the table, and cast the die.

First, he opened a can of milk and drank nearly all of it. Then he crushed an onion into the residue. He added a dash of water and strained the mixture, as best he could, into a sea-shell which he used for a paper-weight.

With this unusual fluid he indited a note to his captain. It was not very long, and covered less than one side of a sheet of paper. He made several copies, and when they were dry, laid them all, blank sides up, on top of the pile from which he had taken them. The words could not be seen, at least in the faint, wavering light of his room.

Afterward he washed the shell, but left the empty tin and the refuse to testify that he had eaten, in case the observant warden should manifest solicitous curiosity.

And now, with good India ink of the land, he wrote an offer of capitulation on the clean surface of the uppermost page, in very fair Visayan, free from hidden meaning or doubt-inspiring mark.

He worked swiftly, and when his inmate returned, appeared to be dozing again. The master had finished his *sena*, the latter reported, and had summoned the seven to his house. The *ministro* was expected, also. Paddy arose and obeyed, with a primal prayer to an unknown God welling up in his heart.

He saluted the seven gravely, and stationed himself beside Pachico's chair.

"I return to you, my General," he said with a profound bow, "what is left of my writing materials; for since the drill is finished, I need them no more."

So naturally as to make it seem quite accidental, he laid his papers upon a pile in front of Pachico. He retained only the completed despatch.

"*Gracias!*" murmured the chief. "While you were coming we discussed the campaign once more. Have you, perhaps, something further to recommend?"

"Nothing. We are ready. I have also prepared the letter, to save your excellency trouble, as a *ministro* should. If it is not good there are the means before you to say what you will."

"Read it."

Paddy, who had remained standing, shifted his weight to one foot and raised the document in both hands while he read:

> To the *Commandante Militar* residing in Sogod.
> VERY RESPECTED SENOR:
> Believing that the welfare of our beloved country so demands, and that peace under the powerful United States is better than a hopeless warfare for our independence, we hereby propose freely, though with painful sorrow, to surrender upon the *plaza* of Malavista on the afternoon of the fourth day that follows the present.
> Most obediently we kiss your hands.

He passed it to Pachico, who scrutinized it closely, his eyes illumined as if to burn a secret from the very pulp. So, too, each of the seven scanned it and a few glanced casually at the other side.

"Is it sufficient?" inquired Paddy. "Or shall another be written?"

"It will serve. It is as well done as that of Capile, who relinquished his command on

Panay last year. Doubtless you saw it in the prints."

"I have read it."

"Let us sign this."

"But wait!" objected one. "We know, surely, that the *Americanos* do not kill if that can be avoided. Yet, if we all sign and the enterprise fails, it may not afterward be convenient for us to visit Sogod, and our families may be incommoded."

"It is true," agreed Paddy.

Now, it was not open to argument that any instructions he wished to give his captain would have to be in English; and that could be accomplished only in his signature. He had reviewed all possible obstacles to this during his meditations. He had contrived a method to meet every emergency pertaining to it. Not until he was sure he could warn his own officers had he conceded his readiness for the undertaking. He had hoped for this particular protest, and was prepared to make it himself. But it pleased him more to have another interpose. He stooped to adjust a lacing upon his tattered shoes to hide his satisfaction.

"Let Pachico," he resumed, "whose name they already know, alone ratify it for himself and his forces; and that the act may be official, let it be attested by the minister of war. Such is the mode of authorities."

"You, *Americano! Carramba!* No! Your name will provoke distrust. Do you tell us they will believe that you, a deserter in time of war, would involuntarily give yourself up to death?"

The old man who hurled this bomb considered a moment, and then, as the minister, who had expected this, was about to speak, a light seemed suddenly to break upon him.

"Pig!" he grunted. "There is more in this than we suspect. Either you and they have planned this thing in a way we have not perceived, or you blunder. It is not that, for you have great intelligence. *Por eso!* It is a hoax! *Americano*, is it not so?"

For an instant Paddy nearly staggered. The little smile hovered upon Pachico's lips.

"Do you not understand," he replied, "that the *Americanos* have stupid ideas about such things? For example, among your soldiers are a few who have been taken by them and then released. Nor have I heard that they have executed a deserter in this war. Will they not suppose that I am aware of their beliefs since I was once as they are? They will say, 'He has induced them to come in, for he prefers our prison to the high places of the Philippines, punishment in his own land to banishment forever. And he hopes, by this, to atone for his crime.' So will they think and thus will they say. You are wrong, as you will see if you reflect upon it."

"Indeed," said Pachico, "he speaks in good sense. If our scouts at any point detect a danger, we can still retire even at the very town. I will yet try this. But if there is a mistake or aught we can not understand, the *Americano* must die. Is it not just?"

It was a strange word for this man to use who had dipped into the rice-pot with a comrade in order to destroy him, but the others answered simply—

"*Justo!*"

"Then I will complete this and the *Ministro* shall witness it."

While the seven maintained a somber silence, Pachico affixed his signature, majestically as an emperor. Then he deferred to Paddy, who leaned over his shoulder and wrote in an awkward scrawl:

Warmotherside Ruff,
Ministro de Guerra,
Zona 16.

Paddy straightened up, well content. But unexpectedly the familiar curve twisted Pachico's mouth and he extended the letter again to the council.

"*Carrajo!*" sputtered one. "This is not the name he gave us!"

"That was easy to speak. This is not even to be read!"

"Nor is there a 'P' for a beginning! It is some character that is neither Visayan nor Spanish!"

Out of the mystery grew suspicion, then threats. There is small room for duplicity where even truth is doubted. But Paddy made one more stand, hoping to deceive them only a little longer. It was not intellect that guided him now, it was the instinct of a man at bay.

"*Basta!*" he shouted, stamping his foot as if in anger. "Why dispute? The name I gave you is but a nickname given me by the infidels. This is my own. Shall I not use it in a message of dignity? It is clear that you have lost your confidence in me. Be it so! I am tired of trying to please you. I will have no more to do with it. Kill me, since that appears to be your wish. Let us end it. But blame yourselves alone if you spend your lives in the poverty of the outside. Come! Decide!"

He paused, standing beside Pachico, one hand gripping the table, the fingers of the other plucking absently behind him at a seam in his clothing. It was hard to die when everything had promised to end so well. All he craved of Heaven, now, as he looked questioningly from one to the other, was that the end might be sudden and the manner of it merciful.

But he had unconsciously appealed to their greed when argument would not have moved them. Pachico took a gambler's chance.

"Let it be as he says," he decreed, "since we choose our own trail."

The malcontents assented, distrustful, like their master; but good gamesters also, as rogues should ever be.

Thus it came to pass that a courier left, early in the morning, for Sogod. They still talked of the missing soldier there, and many a hunt had the captain led through brush and cogon grass till famine and fever beat him back again. Some affirmed that the one they sought was an excellent riddance. But they all vowed, nevertheless, whenever they trod the wilds, to kill a hundred for Paddy if they found his bones.

"He was a man of our company," said they, "worthless or not is no matter. But if he deserted, God help him when we get him!"

It happened, upon a night of rest, that the captain was puzzling over a rumor the natives had spread, which asserted, in substance, the design of the hillmen to yield. And while he was wondering if Paddy were with them, and if so, what he was doing, one of the guard presented himself.

"There's a gu-gu here, sir, on some kind of errand."

A mud-smeared, bare-footed cutthroat, clad in airy clothing loosely woven of coarse hemp, his broad, straw hat in his hand, pattered in and gave the captain a letter.

"H'm! Can't read it."

"Visayan?" queried the lieutenant.

"Uh-hu! Hello! What d'ye think of this? It's from Ruff!"

He entrusted it to Bryant and summoned the sentry.

"Take that man to the company kitchen, give him a meal and hold him until further orders. Tell the first-sergeant I want him."

The sergeant came, and with many a frown and a ponderous pause, translated the momentous lines. He was not the scholar in this work that Paddy was, perhaps because he had learned in a slower school. But he did very well.

"That's all, sergeant," the captain said. "Say nothing about this and caution the men not to discuss that gu-gu around town."

"What do you make of it?" he asked when they were alone.

"Looks fishy," averred the lieutenant. "That little red-head has taken up with them, apparently, and I suppose he's trying to get square, by an ambush, for the hours he's done in the mill."

"Well, that may be so, of course," the captain admitted, "but I can't believe it. There's one thing I'll bank on in Ruff's case. There's no yellow streak in him, whatever else may be said of him. How about it, Scotty?"

The doctor shook his head in perplexity.

"It may be as the captain says. The vagabond's forever blundering into trouble, but he always gets out with a whole skin, whatever may happen to others. He's one of those seraphically serene individuals who scatter misfortune around them in cherubic innocence, but usually die peacefully and painlessly in their beds at a ripe old age. One must have a sense of humor to handle him, I'm thinking. In this instance, if he's in sore straits again, mind ye I don't state it for a fact, but it might be it is not his own people that will pay the piper."

"Well," mused the captain, "perhaps you are right. But if those chaps really mean to quit, there's no reason why they can't just as well come here as for us to go to Malavista."

Bryant nodded in approbation.

"That's what I think. If it's business, they'll come."

"I'll try them on that basis, at any rate. If your idea of an ambush is correct we can avoid it in that way; and in any case, we'll discover what truth there is in the proposition."

He sat down and began to compose an answer in Spanish. Presently he stopped.

"I believe you are right, Bryant. Furthermore, I'll bet that Ruff never wrote it. He would have done it in English, if he and they were in collusion and had meant it for what it purports to be. If they were sincere they would have had nothing to fear from his using his own language. It's a subterfuge of some sort. Another thing. Did you notice the signature? 'Ruff' is there all right, but the given name is a jumble."

"Let me see it again."

All three studied it carefully. After a while Bryant smiled.

"Do you get this?" He separated the words with pencil-marks.

No one spoke for a moment.

"I see two possible combinations," announced the captain, "but one is too cryptic to have any significance. I take it he is telling us to apply heat to the back of this thing."

"I have heard of such tricks," affirmed the doctor. "It might not be foolish to try it."

He did so. At first nothing happened. Then, faintly but by degrees more plainly, there developed this appeal in sepia-colored characters.

> CAPTEN, SIR:
>
> I did not desert. I will tell you how it was if I ever get home. Plese go out on the Malavista trail just as it says, only it's a fake, an' wait close. I told them you wud all go out an' then we wud jump the *convento*. Plese rig a strong bar acrost the outside ov the main store-room doors an' leve it all open but no chow. If you do this capten I will do the rest an' wen you see them go in come quick. If you do not do this it's me for the ant-hills capten plese. Very respectful,
>
> PRIVATE RUFF.

"Phew!" exhaled the captain in a whisper of awe and realization. "That's some nerve!"

"Aye!" commended the doctor. "Adversity sharpens the wits, that her child, Necessity, may be satisfied. 'Tis some compensation, I'm thinking, for one who is knocked about the world, that he becomes more clever than the rest of us."

"You'll do it?" demanded Bryant almost defiantly. "He's got death before and behind him, captain."

"I'll follow him to the dot, if I lose my commission. We'll start work tonight, Bryant, getting things quietly arranged in the *convento*. Suppose you look after that, bearing in mind the fact that they may finish Ruff and get away."

"How about the town?"

"Oh! They know what Pachico is figuring on, already. You can bank on that. Don't think there'll be any of them around. They know him too well to go after anything he wants to loot. I'll leave a volunteer guard for a blind, with directions to run when the gu-gus appear. They can stop the *padre*, also, if he comes prying around."

"Mon," declared the doctor in some agitation, "I was never strong for the hero work. The sick must go too."

The messenger left that very evening and reached Pachico's camp early the next forenoon.

The heart of Paddy sang when he heard the answer read, for his wise captain guaranteed pardons for all, because of their voluntary renunciation of hostilities.

This settled all doubts among the seven, who beamed on Paddy almost worshipfully.

Notwithstanding, lest some mischance occur, he begged more paper for writing orders during the march, and so obtained possession of all that he had used.

At the proper time, when the morning breezes shook the dews from the palms, a full company of American soldiers evacuated Sogod and disappeared on the Malavista trail. The town seemed to be deserted.

Simultaneously, the red head of Paddy Ruff protruded through the thicket on the hilltop opposite.

"He has taken them all, my general, as I predicted. The dogs bark no more. Let us hurry."

Swiftly they descended from the heights, a gleeful mob, and ran down the empty highway straight for the stone *convento*.

The volunteer guard fired wildly at nothing in particular, and fled for their lives.

"The stores, *Americano*!" howled Pachico. "In which of the vaults are the stores and the money?"

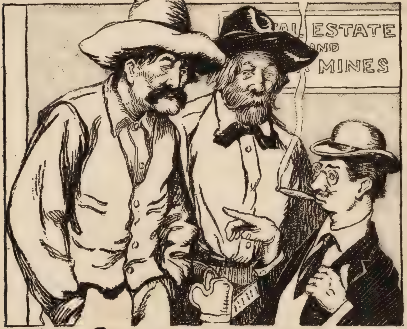
"In there, quick!" sobbed Paddy, who halted at the great doors.

Then, into the deep, high, lower story pushed and writhed and crowded the loot-mad Malays. And when the last had wriggled in, Paddy crashed the heavy barriers together and dropped the long, strong bar into place.

All hell could not equal the screams of the demons shut into those walls. They hacked at the massive entrance and pried at the window-gratings. But Paddy ran toward the jungle as man had seldom sped before; and far away, or so, at least, it seemed to him, were coming his own good people at double time and in perfect order.

"I've made good, captain!" he pleaded, and fell in a faint at their feet.

Psychology And Copper



by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Magpie's Nightbear," "When Oscar Went Wild," etc.

"SCIENTIFIC prospectin' has its merits," announced Ike Harper, as he climbed out of the gopher-hole and sat down beside me on a boulder and filled his pipe, "but fool luck has uncovered more bonanzas than science.

"Now, there was ol' Jerry Sullivan's burro went skatin' down th' hill off th' trail one day and slid th' coverin' off th' Silver Cross, which made uh millionaire outa Jerry. Hen Berry accidentally fired his six-shooter into th' ground oncet and uncovered one of th' richest gold veins in th' State. Yuh can talk science till yer tongue hangs out, but if yuh ain't lucky yuh never hit it rich. Do yuh happen to know uh elongated person named Magpie Simpkins?"

I replied that I had never had that pleasure.

"Pleasure!" he snorted. "No, I reckon nobody ever did. Let me tell yuh why.

"MAGPIE was uh scientific prospector. He could take uh piece uh rock and tell yuh jist what it contained and why it contained said constituents. Mineralogy was an open book to that jasper, and because of it he never made uh strike.

"But he didn't merely go in fer prospectin'. That person was loco on anything except work. I reckon he had tried nearly everything. First he went in fer hypnotism. Not havin' uh likely subject, he tried it on uh wildcat. I reckon he forgot to tell th' cat what it meant. He got loose from th' cat and th' hypnotism thing at th' same time.

"Next he goes in for—wait uh bit; I'm gittin' ahead of my yarn. You asked about th' de-funct Copper King mine uh while ago, and as that is part of th' story I'll connect it all up.

"Me and Magpie has these two claims

here on Plenty Stone Creek which look promisin', and we're figgerin' that maybe we can git some one to buy us out. Magpie has been down to Piperock after grub, and when he comes back he's got uh proposition.

"I knowed all th' time that we hadn't ought to let uh third party into our outfit, but Magpie argues that uh captalist like this feller, Peters, will help smooth our trail uh heap, and bein' right on th' ground he can land us uh buyer.

"Peters was uh queer cuss. He was about knee-high to uh tall Injun, and spent his spare time tryin' to cultivate hair on his face. He wore uh little brown derby hat, and it had uh nervous way uh wigglin' around on top of his head when he was talkin'. He didn't have no chin to speak of—jist sort a slid away from his lower lip. He had money and uh thirst fer th' great West, so he comes to Piperock and opens an office—mines and real estate.

"Mebby he's kumtux to th' real estate, but on mines he don't show uh trace. He has six little books on mineralogy which he reads continually; and when uh feller has to consult uh book every time he sees uh piece uh rock he's in th' same class with th' jasper who opens th' Home Doctor book every time he feels off color—he shore finds symptoms of everything.

"Me and Magpie needs uh grub stake fer our Winter work if we don't sell out, and bein' as Peters is plumb wild to be uh mine owner we lets him buy uh third interest in our claims.

"As Magpie remarks—'He comes uh stranger and we takes him in.'

"I ain't strong fer Peters, but after livin' with Magpie all these years I don't shy at any ordinary freak.

"Now, Magpie has been plumb rational fer several months, and I'm beginning to think he's sort a outgrown his love fer something new in th' scientific line, but I'm wrong. It's only uh sort a 'Not dead but sleepin'' proposition, 'cause one day Magpie pilgrims in from Piperock with uh pack-load uh black-covered books.

"I shore recognizes th' symptoms and goes up to Tellurium Woods' cabin and bunks with him that night. Tellurium is workin' uh copper prospect which he calls th' 'Copper King,' and when I tells him why I'm there he welcomes me openly—him and Magpie ain't jist what you'd call friendly.

"Th' next mornin' I sneaks home cautious like, and when I comes in range I knows that it's workin'. Magpie is oratin' out loud, with nobody to listen except th' pack burros. Right there I quotes General Sherman, but don't mention war a-tall. He quits cold when he sees me and fer th' next few days he surrounds himself with cigarette butts and mystery.

"About this time Peters makes good. He ain't never been up to see our property —I reckon it's 'cause we ain't got no bawthroom—but he gits his rope on one Alfred Myron Cowgill, of Boston, Massachusetts, and sends him up to look it over.

"Alfred knows all about mines—havin' been educated fer th' ministry—and he finds out that we've got th' finest piece uh property he ever seen. Copper pyrites shore makes uh hit with people who don't sabe free gold, and after uh little pow-wow we sells Alfred our prospect hole and goodwill fer five thousand dollars cash.

"Alfred announces that he's got to go back East fer uh while, and he hires me and Magpie to sort a keep people from pesticatin' around on his property, and probably runnin' off with some of his nice yellow pyrites. We're uh heap obliged to Peters, cause this money will make possible uh proposition we've argued uh heap uh times. Old Sourdough Johnson's got uh claim about three miles over th' south fork, which he calls th' 'Daylight,' and me and Magpie have laid awake nights tryin' to figger out how to seperate him from his location.

"Johnson ain't on th' lead and never will be where he's workin', but one day we're comin' across th' claim and find th' real lead. Sticks right out in th' middle of th' claim and she shore is rich. Uh course we don't tell anybody—not even Peters. We're folks that mind our own business thataway.

"But Magpie is too much absorbed with his books to even consider uh minin' deal. He sits there half th' night by th' light of uh candle and prospects them books. He won't eat a-tall. Jist sits there and peruses them books with uh 'Cease yer worldly cares' look on his face. I'm uh heap curious to know what's in 'em, but won't show it enough to pick one up. I know I'll find out all about 'em jist as soon as Magpie gits his system full.

"SOMEBODY tells Tellurium about our sale and he comes down to congratulate us. He's plumb lame with rheumatism, and after th' usual words have been spoken he complains on his affliction uh heap.

" 'What you needs, Tellurium,' remarks Magpie, and I'm pleased to hear his voice once more, 'is uh touch of psychology.'

" 'Ain't I got enough?' snaps Tellurium. 'Rheumatics and plumbago and—shucks! I kain't stand much more.'

" 'Mr. Woods, yore powers uh perception are limited to sourdough bread and low-grade ore,' states Magpie, markin' th' place in his book and reachin' fer another. 'Yore ideas of science don't go beyond throwin' uh diamond hitch and th' correct way to hold yer knife when yuh eats pie.

" 'Remember this—' he shakes his finger at Tellurium and rolls uh smoke one-handed—'I'm not discoursin' on diseases. I'm touchin' on th' grandest subject on earth—science of th' mind, before which all diseases vanish like iron pyrites in boilin' nitric. You ain't got nothin' th' matter with yuh a-tall. It's jist uh lazy streak in yore subconscious mind.'

" 'As I was sayin' before this interruption,' remarks Tellurium, 'as I was sayin', Ike, th' Lord made uh big mistake. Yuh shore got to agree with me that it was an error on His part when He wished long ears and uh brayin' voice on uh perfectly innocent jackass, and let some people I know resemble uh human bein'.'

"Tellurium is uh big hulk of uh man, and Magpie ain't what you'd call uh runt; so after watchin' it uh while I pries 'em apart with uh pick-handle. They arbitrates what's left of th' battle and smoke uh peace pipe. When Tellurium hikes back up th' trail home, I notices that his limp is plumb gone.

" 'That's psychology, Ike,' states Magpie. 'He comes down uh cripple and we sends him home whole. Great stuff, Ike. Now jist let me read yuh one little chapter out loud and I'll bet——'

"I didn't hear it 'cause I'm on my way down to th' pitch stump after kindlin'-wood. One Winter me and him was snowed in up in th' Cœur d'Alenes, and Magpie finds uh copy of th' *Congressional Record*.

"Since then nobody can read out loud to me.

" 'Laziness covers uh multitude uh sins,' announces Magpie, while we're eatin' supper that night. 'Tellurium states that he's only drivin' uh foot uh day. Now, Ike, no man can ever live long enough to develop uh copper mine at that rate. With th' help of psychology he can drift three feet uh day in that formation.'

" 'Well, mebby,' I sort of agrees. 'I don't know th' power of this element yuh claim to have corraled, but I do know Tellurium, and I'm here to state that uh foot uh day is hy-iu driftin' fer him.'

"Magpie peruses his book some plentiful before he opens up again.

"'Ike, I'll bet yuh uh hundred dollars that I can have Tellurium drivin' three feet uh day inside of uh week. I aims to sort of work on his imagination through th' elements uh psychology. Enervate his subconscious mind, *sabe?*'

" 'I passes th' *sabe* part,' I replies, 'but I'll take that bet. Yuh might practise on that he-burro now, Magpie. He's been standin' there under that tree since noon. Reckon he's sick or jist lost his appetite?'

" 'Both, I reckon,' replies Magpie. 'But science of th' mind won't help any in his case 'cause he's done ate up yore Sunday overalls and two pair uh yore wool socks.'

"Th' next day I goes down to Granite to have a talk with Peters about this Daylight Mine deal. Me and Magpie had decided not to tell Peters how good it is, 'cause uh *hombre* like him is jist as apt to talk as not. We don't want ourselves to show in th' deal 'cause Johnson might suspect our motives. Uh feller like Peters looks like uh sucker, and mebby Johnson will make him uh good price.

"Peters swells out his chest and his little derby does uh tango on his head when I puts it up to him. He sure thinks he's an expert. I tells him that it's uh likely lookin' prospect and to shoot th' hull roll if he has to.

"Him bein' some elated I borrows uh hundred from him and goes over to Helena for uh week, leavin' Magpie to his books. I figgers that we can make uh large piece uh money out of th' Daylight without much development work, and I sings uh care-free song while I scatters that hundred amid th' bright lights.

"When I gits back to Piperock th' first person I sees is Magpie, and he welcomes me heartily and also imparts th' information that I'm out uh hundred bucks 'cause

Tellurium's doin' better than three feet uh day, and his rheumatism is ancient history. Of course, bein' uh direct descendant of one uh Missouri's first settlers, I declines to settle without first-hand information.

"We goes up to Peters's office to find out about th' Daylight deal, but he ain't in, so we goes over to Dutch Fred's and plays seven-up until supper-time. Along about dark Peters rides and yells to us that everything is fine.

"We goes up to his office later, and he's there with uh smile and uh glad hand. He looks almost too danged happy, some way.

" 'Gentlemen,' sez he, 'I'm sorry to have kept yuh waitin' so long, but it was uh hard trip; and as I was in th' mountains several days I was badly in need of my tub. Now to business. I—er—have uh smoke.'

"He shoves out uh box uh seegars and we lights up.

" 'My friends and partners, it's uh lucky thing fer you both that you've got uh technical as well as uh practical mining man fer uh partner in yore ventures—meanin' myself. To th' untaught mind of th' average prospector, that Daylight claim might look promisin'. But I saw its defects, gentlemen, I saw its defects. Remember, I took five days in my examination, and refused to make him an offer.'

" 'But, Peters, we've—' began Magpie.

" 'Beg pardon, Mr. Simpkins, but I'd like to finish. As I said before, I turned th' proposition down, but before I returned I had an inspiration. I decided to investigate other prospects in that particular district. Now, here is where you have me to thank, gentlemen. Yesterday afternoon I ran across uh piece uh property that bids fair to make us all rich. It is located in th' vicinity of yore former property, I believe, and is mighty rich in copper—mighty rich, speaking mildly. I beg yore pardon, Mr. Simpkins, did you speak?'

" 'Go ahead,' mumbles Magpie, and I notices that he's got all of that seegar in his mouth, and seems to be slowly chokin' to death.

" 'As I started to say,' resumed Peters, 'I panned some of th' drillin's in this prospect and what do you suppose I found, gentlemen? Native copper! Why, in one pan of that dust I got at least half an ounce.'

"He paused to let this sink in. It shore listens good to me, but Magpie don't seem elated none whatever.

" 'The owner was wise to what he had,' continued Peters, 'and when I offered him five thousand for his claim he laughed at me. But I refused to give up the ship, gentlemen, and after talkin' to him nearly all day I got him to sell us half interest for that price.'

" 'Listen, Peters!' Magpie's Adam's apple is doin' uh war-dance up and down his neck as he stands there weavin' on his heels and glarin' down at Peters. 'What's that prospector's name?'

" 'Mr. Tellurium Woods. Of course, Tellurium is only——'

" 'Yeo-o-o-ow!' yells Magpie, kickin' over his chair and gallopin' to th' door, and we hears him jist hit twice on his way down.

"Me and Peters sits there fer uh spell lookin' foolish-like at each other and not knowin' what to say.

"Finally I opines aloud that I believe Magpie's been eatin' loco salad and I'd better close-herd him before he bites somebody. Uh course Peters politely offers his valuable services, but I'm able to decline with thanks.

"KNOWIN' Magpie's failin' in times uh stress, I ambles straight fer th' nearest hooch emporium. I proves my deductions. There he is, draped over th' bar, lookin' sad-like into uh glass uh *woblum*—that bein' th' Chippeway appellation fer whisky.

" 'Magpie,' sez I, puttin' uh friendly hand on his droopin' shoulder and motionin' to th' barkeep that mine's th' same, 'why this cross between uh foot race and uh Piegan war dance?'

"He looks me over like uh man who is seein' his last white chip go into th' rack. He lifts up his right hand straight over his head like th' peace signs yuh see in movin' pictures and says:

" 'Never again, Ike! Never again!'

"I'm agreeable. I don't know what he means, but I'm pleased. Any time Magpie says 'Never again,' I looks at th' future with more animation.

" 'Ike,' sez he, mournful-like, 'I'm sorry. It ain't fair to you. I reckon I'm one uh them unfortunate persons who are born with uh lot uh brains and no sense. Some way I seems to ball up everything. But, Ike, I asks yuh, how did I know? I can't see that far, and it seemed like——'

" 'Magpie,' I replies, 'let's have uh little more uh th' same and then I'll accept any explanation yuh delivers. Remember, I'm uh heap in th' dark yet.'

"'Ike, yo're uh trustin' soul. Yuh shore are salt uh th' earth. I shore spilled th' beans, Ike, but I proved my point. Yes, sir, I reckon I proved it entirely. I knowed that uh little psychology with uh dash uh copper would make Tellurium—dang his little old petrified, moss-backed, narrow, contracted soul——'

"'Pardner uh mine,' I interrupts, 'drink yore liquor and ferget them little ol' books fer oncet. Fer old Tellurium's sake I'm glad he's struck it rich. We'll amble up there tomorrow, and if she's as rich as Peters says she is we'll——'

"'Yah!' snorts Magpie. 'Don't talk Peters to me, Ike! I'm uh man of peaceful pursuits, but if I ever lays eyes on that little dancin' derby hat uh his I'm goin' to shoot.'

"'Peters is workin' fer our interests, Magpie, and——'

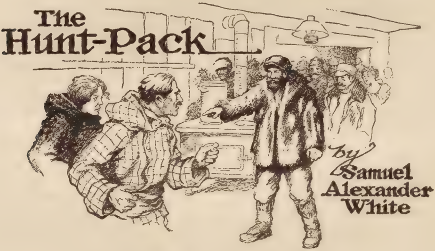
"'Listen, Ike.' Magpie takes me by th' arm and leads me out of th' saloon. 'Uh grog-shop, Ike, ain't no place to discourse on scientific themes.'

"He leads me around the corner of th' building.

"'Remember our bet on Tellurium's driftin' average, Ike?'

"I replies that I've uh hazy recollection of it.

"'Well, Ike, winnin' that hundred from you, coupled with th' assistance of one Peters, has lost us th' Daylight mine,' he announces slow and distinct. 'Psychology ——! Remember that old copper bolt that was in our shack, Ike? Well, I—I took that bolt and ground her up, and salted his danged mine!'"



The Hunt-Pack

By Samuel Alexander White

Author of "The Ocean Borne," "The Spoilsman," etc.

IN HILARIOUS Happy Camp, on the north side of Chilkoot Pass, inbound stampeders traveling laden and outbound packers traveling light, rested by night from the toil of the trail. Foregathered in the Saxon Saloon they relaxed their muscles, their throats and their poke-strings.

Motley crowds haunted the bar on one side of the huge canvas room, surrounded the gaming-tables on the other side, clogged the central space where, within a circle of chairs, a red-hot stove throbbed like a giant engine and overflowed upon the dancing-floor at the rear.

A haze of smoke invested everything, blurring the oil-lamps swung from the ridge-pole, and softening the uncouth garments and rough faces of the men.

In all quarters, except in the immediate vicinity of the tables, where a businesslike quiet reigned, was laughter, song and badinage; was clamor, jest and camaraderie; was open hand, open heart and a devil-take-to-morrow's-worry atmosphere. Old-timers, hailing from opposite ends of the earth, called one another friend and swapped harsh experiences, vile tobacco and colossal lies; while chechakos, to whom these seared adventurers were little less than gods, worshiped meekly at their feet, imbibing among other things instruction in the ways and wiles of the land.

And with the noise of the main room of the Saxon at its height, into it swept like a flood the babel of the dance-hall. Blended music of violin and piano stopped. Twoscore couples circling the floor whirled about and made a concentrated rush for refreshments. In a shrieking, giggling, shoving mass they surged forth, the women in satins and pumps, the men in moccasins and mukluks and fur or mackinaw coats, shaking the oil-lamps on the ridge-pole with their raucous laughter, swirling the haze of the place into strange eddies with the violence of their charge.

For this was a night of rejoicing. This was Happy Camp! The Titanic climb of storm-harried Chilkoot was past, and the trend of the gold-trail now led down the mountain and onward by ice-bound lake and river to desired Dawson. That many who had started up the Pass from Dyea had never crossed the Summit, had drowned in Dyea River, broken their necks in the Cañon, got caught near the Scales by shoving glacier or thundering avalanche, or fallen to frost and blizzard upon the Palisades, was not a thing to be remembered at this hour. The rest were here, the survivors, the fit, the strong, in whom life flowed fiercely with its primordial pulse, and they were reveling in triumph and shouting toasts to the trough roof, when the door of the Saxon opened and the frost puffed in a fog-bank into the superheated room.

OUT of the fog-bank stepped two figures, a man and a woman, fresh from the trail. Their parkas where they clung tightly over their backs and sagged on their hips were rimmed with hoarfrost, advertising body-sweat congealed, and about the close-drawn puckers of their hoods icicles hung like tusks.

Upon the two were the unmistakable signs of the Chilkoot climb. New recruits to the ranks of the strong they seemed, and the triumphant army in the Saxon acclaimed them with a thunderous cheer.

The man and the woman held their heads over the heat. The icy tusks thawed and fell to sizzle and steam upon the glowing stove-top. The two shoved back the parka hoods and nodded genially to their welcomers.

But the moment the newcomers' faces were bared, a thick-set man in moccasins, German socks and bearskin coat stagged off at the hips, rose up on the other side of the stove and peered sharply through the steam. Next, an unspoken question in his eyes, he gazed significantly at his six companions around the fire. They likewise scrutinized the late arrivals for a keen second, looked back at the thick-set man in the stagged-off bearskin and nodded grimly.

Whereupon the bearskin-clad one raised an authoritative hand amid the bedlam of the Saxon.

At once the din lessened.

"What's up, Bassett?" yelled an irrepressible member of the dance crowd. "Relatives of yours?"

"Maybe they come through the Chilkoot by tunnel and ain't had the third degree of the Pass!" hazarded another facetiously. "Tom's going to find out."

But Tom Bassett had stepped swiftly round the stove and laid a hand upon the shoulder of the man in the parka.

"What might your name be, stranger?"

"Karle Lott."

"Lie number one! It's Jose Cantine. And who's the woman with you?"

"My wife!" He resentfully shook off Bassett's hand.

"Lie number two, you hound! It's Eric Sark's wife—vamoosed with in White Pass City months and months back! Aw, hold up!" Bassett seized the hand that dived under the parka and jerked it forth again. "You don't go gunnin' with me. If you was fair game I'd sure let you, but you ain't. My pardner Sark's got a mortgage on you. And if I was over in his place establishin' relay camps on another trail and he was here in mine you'd pay right now. I'm sufferin' sorry he ain't here, but all the same it's a bloody short morator-ee-um you're gittin', Cantine. Savvy? That's why I'm lettin' you stay hull-skinned."

"Well, if you're lettin' me stay whole-skinned what you crossin' me for then?" fiercely demanded the man in the parka, anger darkening his already dark eyes, tensing sharper his already sharp features. "Mind, I ain't admittin' I'm Cantine either.

But if I was Cantine, and you ain't goin' to perforate Cantine on sight, what in Hades do you mean?"

"Mean?" echoed Bassett. "Your gall is sure chilled steel and case-hardened on top. Do you think as me or any other white man's goin' to eat, drink or sleep with or breathe the same air as you? You as broke the bond of bread and blanket, the Northland law as no man ever breaks, and lives to boast of it! Days on end I seen you sit at table with my pardner Sark under his own roof in White Pass City. Nights on end I seen you smoke by his fireside and bed down in his blankets. And with the guile of your stinkin' soul you was plannin' and executin' his betrayal every blasted minute of the time!

"Then ag'in, do you think as any woman in this camp's goin' to suffer the companionship of yon female you call your wife who's ten times guiltier'n you? The girls of Happy Camp is slightly frivolous and not what you'd term pernickety, but they draw the line at her. And I tell you, Cantine, I draw the line at you. I wouldn't deserve to be called Sark's pardner if I didn't. I wouldn't deserve to be called a white man if I didn't. I'm strong for sanitation here. The likes of you two is stench and putrefaction in a healthy place. Savvy what I mean? You git to blazes outa Happy Camp!"

Bassett released the other's wrist as he spoke, and the man, his lips drawn up in a wolf-dog's snarl, stepped back a yard.

"I'll be bludgeoned if we do!" he snapped. "You ain't proved anything yet. Anyway there ain't anything to prove."

Tom Bassett gazed at him with a wearied air and resignedly waved a hand to his companions.

"Who is he, men?" he asked.

As one man, six of them took pipes out of their mouths, lowered their feet from the guard-rail of the stove, and spat toward the damper.

"Jose Cantine!" they chorused.

Immediately their feet went up to the guard-rail again, and their pipes went back to their mouths.

"And about the woman!" Bassett paused and scanned the throng of dancers. "Where's White-Pass-City Winnie?" he asked. "Ain't she here tonight? I thought I seen her yeller dress somewhar. Oh, she's at the back, eh? Well, trot her forrard."

The throng shifted, leaving an irregular lane in its center.

Through this lane a fresh-faced girl of twenty-four or -five pushed from the rear, the rustle of her canary-satin dress and the tap-tap of her dainty pumps falling with strange distinctness across the silence of the Saxon.

"Winnie, shake hands with an old friend of yours!" yawned Bassett.

White-Pass-City Winnie gave one swift, curious glance at the woman by the stove and recoiled, her nose in the air.

"Me? Shake with Blera Sark? Not much! And if I'd shamed as good a man as Eric Sark for a cur like Jose Cantine I'd spare my old friends the sight of my face!"

Winnie, arms folded so tight as to lock her hands away from any possible contamination, flounced back into the front rank of the dance-crowd and remained there standing on her dignity and her high heels.

For a little the other woman gazed fixedly at her scorner. Then her flushed face, still handsome in spite of the marring frontier life, began to quiver and work. Her hands clenched upon the breast of her parka, and tears splashed down and hissed upon the stove.

"You—you—vixen!" she choked.

For revelation as well as inexpressible hurt was White-Pass-City Winnie's opinion of her social status.

Yet her shame and her tears had no weakening effect upon those about her. Bassett was gazing significantly at Cantine.

"No good, Jose!" he shrugged. "Seein' as I'm an all-fired, welded and cemented pardner of Sark's, I figgered you wouldn't be anyways partial to my views; I figgered you'd be hard-bent on disputin' my identification if ever I spotted you. So I ain't standin' on my own identification. I'm standin' on the identification of these here six men as knowed you along the White Pass Trail. I'm standin' on the identification of White-Pass-City Winnie, who was a close friend of Blera Sark's. What's more, I'll bet a thousand ounces thar ain't a person present as doubts yon evidence. If thar is let him speak up for you!"

Bassett's challenging glance traveled swiftly round the Saxon. The dancing-floor was empty, the bar deserted, every faro, stud-poker, draw-poker, crap and roulette table idle. To a man the stakers had left their stiffest games to hear the controversy in the middle of the room. And to a man they stood with Tom Bassett. No one spoke for Cantine.

"It's settled!" decided Bassett, whirling upon Jose. "And lemme tell you you're gittin' outa Happy Camp pretty safe. I know many's the camp as would give you twenty lashes for stealin' a rind of bacon. And for stealin' a man's wife and home and hopes and honor—say, Cantine, liquid hell-fire ain't a squirt on what they'd do to you. You're lucky to be goin' so safe. Now git!"

"We won't!" defied Jose recklessly. "We've come twenty-odd miles, climbed nigh four thousand feet, and it's forty-one below zero by the thermometer on the door. You can't turn us out on a night like this."

"Kin't?" growled Bassett. With a quick jerk he flipped his watch from his pocket on to his open palm. "Sixty seconds I'm givin' you," he announced. "Walk through that door before then or git thrown through arter!"

The Saxon was very still. Bristling like a malemiut at bay, Jose Cantine half-crouched in front of Bassett, who intently held the watch on him.

"One, two, three, four, five—ten—fifteen—" rasped Bassett's deep voice monotonously counting off the seconds.

Cantine's coal-black eyes shifted appealingly round the room, but the crowd of men gazed back at him stolidly.

"Twenty—thirty—forty—fifty—sixty!"

Bassett flipped his watch into his pocket and jumped.

As he jumped, Cantine's hand again dived under his parka. He had the Colt out this time before Tom grasped his arm. Two shots went wild through the stovepipe, but, his wrist twisted with a violent wrench, Cantine felt the weapon slipping from his fingers, felt himself lifted like a doll in Bassett's powerful hands and bundled to the door.

In the doorway Bassett poised a second. Suddenly he kicked. Cantine hurtled down the slope like a football, gaining momentum every second, and plunged into a snowdrift one hundred yards below.

"Now, missus——"

But the woman who had been Blera Sark fled past Bassett after Jose.

"Mebbe you think you've run ag'in a pretty hard snag in me!" Bassett called down the slope to them. "You haven't. I'm a gentle, ministerin', velvet-fingered angel of mercy to what you'll strike before you make Dawson City!"

He closed the Saxon door against the boring frost.

"The air sure smells better," he observed, sniffing with relief.

"Sure does," nodded the old-timers by the stove. "But what trail's your pardner plantin' relay camps on?"

"The Nordenskold Trail," answered Bassett. "That's the same trail yon two skunks is takin' on from Whitehorse, only they dunno it yit. But, ladies and gentlemen," apologizing to the crowd, "I'm sure sufferin' sorry to be the cause of the delay in your fun. Don't let her delay any longer. Go cavortin' to it!"

Immediately clamor broke out again.

Violin and piano struck up.

The click of the ivory roulette-ball and the rattle of dealt cases arose from the tables.

Happy Camp was Happy Camp once more, and for it the incident was closed.

BUT not for Cantine and the woman.

She helped the cursing Jose to pull himself out of the drift, and together they floundered back to the beaten trail.

In the snow-walled defile they stood a moment, gazing upward at the glowing lights of Happy Camp and the stark outline of Chilcoot Mountain etched against a green night sky.

With a string of muffled imprecations Jose made a move as if to go back up the slope, but Blera put her hands on his shoulders and checked him.

"Don't, Jose, don't!" she besought. "They'll maim and manhandle you till you're a proper cripple. And the word'll go round like a plague. There isn't any tent there for us tonight."

"I ain't seein' any here either, then," snarled Jose. "You know how light we come over the Pass to make it in a day. Grub enough for one stop, and no blankets!"

"Well," shivered Blera petulantly, "there's lots of fire, isn't there? What's the use of lamenting in the frost?"

Happy Camp marked the edge of timber-line after the nakedness of the glacier-scoured rocks and volcanic slag about Crater Lake and the steeps above, and into the first scrubby pines Cantine and the woman turned.

Here was a chaos of dead and splintered trunks as thick as a man's arm, and piling these up they kindled a giant fire. Food was lacking. Yet they melted snow in a drinking-cup that Cantine carried in his pocket and swallowed great drafts of hot water.

Blankets they were likewise powerless to improvise. They simply threw big heaps of green spruce boughs beside the fire and, lying upon them close to the coals, basked and drowsed, warming back and breast alternately in the terrific cold, and alternately rising to drag on fresh fuel.

Above them in the January night the aurora flashed and dimmed, and the sapphire stars leaped with dire prophecy of still intenser cold. And the January day, when it came, was as the night, except that the stars vanished and the aurora ceased to play. The jagged, sunless world was frigid, stiff and white, and the green night sky had changed to muddy gray.

Cantine and Blera arose early, drank more hot water and plowed down the ice-trail across Deep Lake and Long Lake, ancient volcano pits that with Crater linked Lake Linderman to the mountains.

All about them the stampede was on the move, hurrying along the deep trench of trampled snow which constituted the trail. The throng hauled loaded hand-sleds, drove dogs attached to loaded dog-sleds or went by man-power under enormous packs. Ever these packs were cast down without care at the side of the trail while the owners back-tripped for more till the side snows were heaped with bags, boxes and rope-lashed bundles of all descriptions.

On the right of Cantine and Blera, on their left, ahead of them, behind them were tons upon tons of provisions, yet they dared not put forth their hands to lift a morsel. Well they knew the Northland law concerning wayside caches, and well they knew the punishment that fell upon him who broke the law. The bitter resentment they nursed against Bassett who had ejected them from Happy Camp and against all the rest who had consented to that ejection blazed into a sort of savagery, a hatred of their own breed which mocked and tantalized and ostracized them.

Every man of that breed bound inward had a vision before his eyes and a hope in his heart. Each worked in a frenzy and performed prodigies of toil for the attainment of his vision and the realizing of his high ambition, but the jaded souls of Cantine and Blera did not respond to any such spur.

From the start they had been under no spell but the spell of shallow, garish enticements; and the unlooked-for collision with Tom Bassett and the specter of another day had seared them into callousness. Without lifting eyes to their companions of the trail who passed, met, repassed and oftentimes jostled them, they plodded, pariahs of their race, down the frozen surface of Long Lake.

Near Long Lake's foot a string of seven sleds drawn by swift dog-teams, and going light, overtook them. They drove down upon the two without the customary warning hail.

Cantine and the woman had barely time to throw themselves prone into the side snow before the lead-dog of the first team, ripping at them with vicious fangs, flashed past. The other teams flashed after, each dog taking the chance to snap futilely at their moccasined heels and the drivers with raucous laughter flicking their whiplashes like long, black snakes into the drifts around the heads of the fallen pair.

Although no blow had been landed on them, the demonstration rankled in the hearts of Jose and Blera. Blera knew that had it not been for the fact that she was a woman the blows would surely have been sent home and perhaps the wolf-dogs swerved from their course to rend them as they ran. More bitter still her anger flared, and Jose himself quivered with passion as he clambered out of the side snow back into the trail and reviled the disappearing seven. He could not fully identify the befurred and parka-clad drivers, but he had a suspicion that they were Tom Bassett and the six men who had sat around the stove the night before in the Saxon Saloon.

On down to Lake Linderman, the end of the twenty-eight-mile portage over Chilcoot from Dyea Beach, he carried his suspicion, and there at Linderman Landing he found his suspicions justified.

The shore of the lake was dotted with log-cabins, half-log and half-canvas cabins and flimsy tents, standing where the whipsaws had swept the trees away. On the edge of the main trail just at the dip to the ice bulked the Linderman Restaurant run by

Flambald. It flaunted a huge cotton sign painted with pies and prices and advertised a satiating meal for ten dollars in gold. Instinctively Cantine and Blera increased their pace as they made for it.

There was a crowd about the door. Cantine went to push through and suddenly recoiled. Tom Bassett lounged on one end of the log door-step with his back against the log wall.

"What's the matter, Cantine?" grinned Tom derisively. "Ain't you hungry?"

Cantine put out a hand for his companion and gingerly, his eyes watching Bassett for an untoward action, moved over the door-step. He seemed astounded that he got across untouched. He looked back over his shoulder uncertainly, half paused and went on again toward the tables. Bassett had never moved a muscle. Only Cantine could see the derisive profile of his nose, cheek and mouth as he leaned against the outside wall, and the sight awoke in Jose queer premonitions.

Nevertheless he boldly handed Blera into a chair and waited for some one to take his order. No one came. Jose beckoned madly, but the waiters were always busy. They nodded, but they never came. In the fury of his hunger Jose leaped up and rushed over to the plank desk where Flambald took the money for the waiters' checks.

"Look here!" he flared. "We're famished, and your waiters are a lot of dummies. Send some one round with grub."

Flambald, a man of colossal and unhealthy girth, looked at him over the plank desk.

"You go to condemnation!" he bellowed. "You aren't eating here."

"Why? What in——"

"Stop!" roared Flambald. "This is my house. I feed who I like, but you I don't like. Savvy?"

Jose savvied.

Flambald's hand was on a huge iron paper-weight that held his bills upon the plank desk, and there was no arguing. Jose silently beckoned Blera and slunk out again.

On the door-step lounged Bassett, and Jose turned in the trail to curse him futilely. He knew better than to try any other restaurant. Bassett had passed the word. His receptions would be all the same. Also he knew better than to try force. He had had his lesson from that up by timberline. Besides, Blera's hand was on his arm, fearfully dragging him on down Linderman's frozen bosom.

Thus began a grim game in which Bassett was persecution personified, a Nemesis unshakable. He passed them on Lake Linderman, welcomed them at Bennett Post, and once more showed them the tail of his sled halfway down to West Arm on Bennett Lake.

That night they spent much like the preceding one, feeding a gigantic fire, drinking inconceivable quantities of hot water and gnawing mangy dried salmon purchased at a Stick Indian teepee on Lake Bennett's shore.

Thenceforward Bassett's hand as well as the hand of every other man was against them up the chain of lakes. The white breed of the land was a hunt-pack turned upon them, and though by virtue of stray Indian camps they survived through Caribou Crossing, Tagish Post and McClintock Post to Whitehorse, Bassett beat them in the end.

For on the Fifty-mile River beyond the Whitehorse camp his dog-sled passed them once again, and the next far post was Selkirk at the Pelly's mouth.

"Jose, how many miles to Selkirk?" asked Blera as they stared after the vanishing outfit.

"More'n two hundred and fifty," answered Jose dejectedly. "Bassett's got us, sure."

"No, he hasn't, then!" Blera's blue eyes flashed in the frost, and she shook her furgantleted hand in Bassett's wake. "He's aiming to starve us out on the river-stretch and make us quit it again, but it'll take a sore sight more than him to do it!"

"How you meaning? We can't make Selkirk on hot water and dog-feed."

"I know that, but there's the Dalton Trail."

"By thunder! Say, I hadn't figured on that track! But it'll do. Blera, you're sure a—a—a winner. I know there's a Stick village at the mouth of the Klokhok—old Tutchi's Village. I've been in it often. The beggars is rich. They're lousy with dogs, and we'll dicker for some and go down the Middle Fork of the Nordenskold. After that, Dawson's dead easy with dogs. And in Dawson we'll lie low till we get a chance to square up with Mister Bassett. Come on!"

Endowed with redoubled energy at his

bettered prospects, Jose turned and sped off in a long lurching snowshoe stride for the mouth of the Takhini River which emptied into the Fifty-mile halfway between Whitehorse and Lake Laberge.

They turned up the Takhini, sometimes called the Mendenhall since both these rivers joined to form the larger stream which emptied into the Fifty-mile, the Mendenhall draining Taye Lake lying to the westward on the Dalton Trail and the Takhini flowing north by east from Kusawa Lake between the Yukon River and the Dezadeash country.

Cantine and Blera were traveling almost due westward. On their left to the south lay Haeckel Hill. On their right to the north loomed the Miner's Range, and on the far horizon beyond the valley of the tributary Klokhok jutted higher, nameless peaks. In interminable vastness the land spread before them, virgin ground off from the main-traveled trail to Dawson City, and the stupendous extent of it was enough to strike fear into the human heart.

But Cantine had no fear. In the lonely expanse he knew the spot where was life and warm teepees and food. Tutchi was a chief, and he kept his village in a fairly sanitary condition, a condition immeasurably superior to that of the squalid teepees to be found along the Yukon basin. Cantine had been there and he knew, and up the Takhini's smooth ice he pressed at a furious pace, the beast instinct of him yearning for food and the human side of him yearning for a place where he might without dread of contumely take on again the status of the white.

Jose's sentiments were in a degree reflected in his companion. She ran at his heels with the swing of the Northwoman trained to the trails, and she seemed to have no difficulty in keeping his pace.

THE Klokhok River they sought flowed south along the base of the Miner's Range into the Takhini. All afternoon they held on for it and at night swung suddenly to the right into its spruce-fringed mouth. Yonder by the fringe of spruce on the low bench-land was the site of Tutchi's Village, but to Cantine's astonished eyes there glowed no teepee fires between the black trunks.

"Blazes!" he exclaimed in alarm as he surveyed the bare bench-land. "She's gone, Blera. And how in tarnation's that? It wasn't just a camping-ground. It was a permanent village. But maybe they've shifted up-stream or back in the range. Let's see if there's a trail."

With a swift pang of fear and loneliness caused by she knew not what, Blera mechanically followed Cantine as he skimmed up the snow-sheeted ice alongside the Klokhok's left limit. In that moment of nondiscovery of the village the inimical wild crept close to her. She saw it as a concrete force, strong, sure, ruthless as the persecuting Bassett or the avenging hand of Eric Sark.

Her fear grew upon her so that she drew near to Jose in his search, her hand on his elbow, and skimmed with him stride by stride. Her eyes were furtively turned to the dark spruce forests crowding on either side, while the eyes of her companion scrutinized the snowy bank. That was why neither of them marked the scum ice, fragile mask of an unfrozen spring, straight ahead.

They did not mark it, but the moment it rattled and shaled off against the frames of their shoes their trained ears telegraphed the danger. Instinctively both made a violent half-turn in mid-stride, but the movement was not enough to carry them clear. It served only to jerk them against each other, and together they sank to their shoulders through the scum ice.

The Klokhok's waters were as cold as the vault of death.

For an instant the contact paralyzed the two. Then their arms fell like flails upon the rotten shell about them. For yards they broke their way to shore and pulled themselves like leaden-footed divers up the bank.

A clump of blasted spruce stood on the shore, and, struggling against the clog of their garments which were setting as hard as armor, they madly tore down armfuls of the boughs.

"Jose, the matches!" gasped Blera, dropping on her knees beside the pile. "Give them to me. I'll light it. You pile on more. Don't stop piling!"

Jose snatched up the stiff, crackling front of his parka and dabbed his numbing fingers into the pocket of his vest where he kept his matches in a little bottle tightly corked, the best waterproof match-safe the Northman knows.

Even as he jabbed his fingers in he uttered a cry of pain and jerked them out again.

The ends showed all bloody and studded with bits of broken glass.

Pallor swept Cantine's swarthy face till he looked like a statue in bronze as he stood staring stupidly at his finger-ends and watching the hot blood freeze.

"Jose! Jose!"

Blera's voice rang thin as a wail in the frosty stillness.

She sprang to Jose, seized on the cloth of his vest and pushed the pocket inside out from the bottom so that the contents fell into the palm of her left gantlet.

Mingled with the broken glass of the bottle was a muddled mass of splintered match-stumps and sodden heads.

"Must have done it in the fall!" quavered Jose, still staring stupidly. "I felt your snowshoe take me hard in the ribs when we went down."

But Blera did not heed.

She was kneeling again by the pile of spruce branches, scratching match-head after match-head.

None of them would light despite her frantic and repeated trials. In despair she threw the sodden mass into the unlit pile of twigs and turned again to Cantine.

"Your Colt, Jose!" she appealed, rising stiffly. "Your Colt! You can start it with a shot!"

"My Colt?" Cantine looked bewildered. The frost seemed to be deadening his senses already. "My Colt, Blera? Oh, yes. Bassett took it, 'way back at Happy Camp!"

"Good God!" screamed Blera, remembering.

She threw out her arms, weakly trying to fight up circulation, and a second time the ruthless spirit of the wild came very close.

To her terrified eyes it seemed to leap out of the darkness of the spruce, a material presence, and mock her with a shout that reverberated across the fireless land.

It rushed upon her. She could hear the crunch-crunch of its footsteps in the crust. Its grip fell upon her shoulder, and she shrieked insanely.

"Steady, missus, steady!" soothed a mumbling, half-articulate voice.

And not till the spoken words smote on her consciousness could she realize that the material presence was a humble man. Then she gave a little moan of relief and put out a hand for Jose to share in her discovery.

In the arctic gloom they could not see the man's face at all, but they gathered that he had been disturbed at supper by their cries, for he was capless and coatless. Also he held in his hand a generous slab of pilot-bread, and this it was which, cramming his mouth, rendered his speech so inarticulate. Wildly leading the race, the bread in his left hand and Blera's frozen gantlet in his right, he hurtled them over the snows between the spruce trees and banged them into his cabin doorway.

At their advent five wolf-dogs leaped up snarling from their rest beside the stove.

"Lie down!" gurgled Cantine's and Blera's rescuer.

He kicked the dogs soundly in the ribs till they retreated into the huge empty wood-box that stood behind the stove.

"I don't like the brutes inside," he mumbled, still wrestling convulsively to get rid of the gagging pilot-bread, "but it's a case of have to keep them inside or get them eaten whole. Tutchi's Village is full of savage semi-wolves, and they run the river in a hunt-pack every night."

"Tutchi's Village!" exclaimed Cantine, his teeth clicking incessantly as he whacked the ice from his garments. "Where's it moved to? It was hunting sign of it we fell in."

"Moved five miles up the Klokhok," spluttered the other, setting the stove-door ajar to obtain a floor-streamer of light in the gloomy cabin. "But you better strip quick. Use that back room there to change. You'll find a dunnage-bag full of clothes—some of them woman's things—under the bunk. While you throw them on, I'll rustle more wood to stoke up the stove. I used all I had in to cook supper. And you can light the candle on the shelf there to see by. I was just getting up to reach for it when I heard your yells!"

Gulping down the last of his pilot-bread, the owner of the cabin was gone while he spoke.

Cantine reached up to the shelf, took off the tallow candle stuck in a wide-necked pickle-bottle, reached a box of matches from the same shelf and lighted the wick.

From force of habit he fingered up a small bunch of matches out of the box and went to shove them into his vest pocket.

"Wait, Jose, wait!" cautioned Blera. "They'll be as bad as the others if you put them there. Put them in the dry clothes, and after this don't trust a bottle any more. Get one of those rubber match-safes with the screw top. And now for the dry clothes! I feel as if I can work my arms and legs once more."

Taking the candle from Jose, she moved across the cabin toward the door of the back room. The yellow light flooding the main room showed it to be built of the customary spruce logs chinked with moss and plastered with mud.

The floor was of rough-hewn slabs. Of slabs, too, but a little better smoothed, was the rude table upon which supper was spread. The table stood under the window which instead of glass for a light boasted a square of golden-brown moose-skin rubbed so smooth as to be almost transparent.

Upon the opposite wall was a bunk also formed of slabs. The Yukon stove stood at the end, and it, with the wood-box behind, completed the furnishings of the cabin.

Out of the empty wood-box the huskies raised their heads and growled so ominously at Blera's and Jose's movements that the two ran the last few steps across the floor and shut the door of the back room with a bang.

The back room was but a logged-in annex to the main room and without window or door. A bunk constituted its only furnishing, and it appeared to be used as a store-room, for grub-bags and odds and ends were piled neatly in its corners.

Blera set the candle on a pile of sacks and ferreted out the dunnage-bag from under the bunk. Its lashings were loose, and she tumbled the contents out on the floor where each could pick what was needed.

The rapid run from the river to the cabin and the genial atmosphere of the cabin itself had somewhat warmed their blood as well as partly thawed their mail-like garments. Hastily they ripped off the clammy parkas, mackinaws and woolens and began the process of replacing them with dry ones.

For the most part Blera dressed like Jose in arctic underwear, flannel shirt, German socks and moccasins, but when it came to outer garments she searched in the heart of the disorderly pile on the floor for the woman's things the owner of the cabin had mentioned.

Finally she fished them out, a buckskin waist and a mackinaw skirt with a pronounced plaid pattern.

The waist went on like any waist, but at sight of the skirt Blera's breath whistled in her throat. Her face convulsed in an appalling discovery. She held the plaid mackinaw close to the candle, examining the band and the vent at the back.

"What's wrong with it?" asked Cantine, looking up from his own dressing. "Lousy?"

"Jose, it's the same! Here's the band leather sewn on to keep the sheath-knife from wearing it and the hooks and eyes of copper wire on the vent. Jose, it's my skirt! And he's——"

"Sark!" roared Jose.

Terror transformed Cantine's features. He wildly scanned the walls of the back room for window or door, but, as he remembered now, there was no window or door.

"Blera, we're trapped!" he faltered with a great revelation. "We're trapped, and Bassett's done it. This is the trail his partner was putting relay camps on, the Nordenskold Trail. The road down the Middle Fork runs right here. Why in Hades didn't we watch where we were going?"

Blera, unanswering, held the mackinaw skirt spread out in her hands. She was trembling from head to foot, and her eyes stared wide under the surge of emotion, jumbled emotion, fear, remorse, anxiety, longing, despair.

"Bassett's done it!" repeated Jose. "Curse his bloody heart, he knew where his partner was. He knew if he closed the Yukon against us we'd have to travel the Nordenskold. I wish, to blue brimstoned blazes, I'd been quicker with my Colt that night up at—but what in thunder's the use of raving?" He stopped short in his furious passion. "We got to do something. We got to do it mighty sudden. Blera, what in tarnation can we do without dogs, arms or grub?"

"I don't know what we can do," answered Blera, breathing as if she were sobbing, "but we got to get out of here. Put on dry parkas and draw the hoods close and beat it. Maybe we can get out before he comes in. If we don't, tell him—tell—him we got to keep right on. Tell him your brother's sick up in the Miner's Range. Here's a bullet knocking around in the dunnage-bag. Put it in your mouth, and it'll help change your voice some. And for God's sake let's keep our parka hoods drawn tight."

BLERA dropped the plaid mackinaw skirt and, contorting feverishly, they both donned parkas and pulled open the door.

But as they stepped out into the main

room of the cabin the door of it rattled, was kicked back, and both his arms full, Sark staggered in with the wood.

Instantly, as before, the five huskies leaped viciously across the floor at Jose and Blera.

Sark let fall his load, caught up a single billet and belabored the beasts over the heads.

"Down, Skookum! Down, Culuk!" he yelled. "Get to blazes behind the stove!" He overcame their stubborn resistance and hammered them into submission. "Now stay behind it, you savages!"

He turned apologetically to his guests.

"But hold on!" he exclaimed, noting the drawn parka hoods which allowed only their eyes to be seen. "You're not for hitting the trail again tonight, eh?"

"We got to," twanged Jose, the bullet in his mouth altering his voice and causing him to enunciate through his nose. "We got to get along on the jump. My brother's sick up in the Miner's Range, up on the headwaters of the Klokhok. We got to keep going tonight, for I sent him word I'd reach him tomorrow."

"Thunder!" exclaimed Sark. "That's different. And I'm sorry. But you eat before you travel. You and your missus need solid grub and steaming drink after yon bath. I was just taking the last bite myself. There's lots of pilot-bread and moose meat and hot coffee on the stove. Dig in!"

Sark waved a hand toward the laden table.

Blera who, although the parka hood concealed every part of her face but her eyes, could not forbear averting her head, turned slightly and took a sidelong glance at Eric Sark. As she viewed the familiar figure so clear in the candlelight, big of limb and of chest, blue-eyed, granite-featured, with the raven-black in his beard and hair, she had an almost unconquerable desire to cry out or to run.

Yet she did neither.

She remained stone-still till her eyes encountered those of Cantine and strayed with them to the food upon the table.

After their days of hunger it was a great temptation, and they fell. Flight delayed, and still trusting to the masks of their parka hoods, they stretched out ravenous hands and munched fiercely upon the bread and meat and gulped the steaming coffee.

Jose removed the bullet from his mouth while he ate, but both he and Blera were careful to sit backing the tallow-candle which Sark placed upon its shelf again, so that their faces were cast in gloom.

Sark, to maintain the part of host, picked up the remainder of the slab of pilot-bread he had carried when he rescued them and poured himself another cup of coffee.

"What might your name be, stranger?" he asked.

Blera started, the piece of moose-shoulder she was munching slipping to the floor.

"Karle Lott!" coughed Jose through the drink he snatched.

"Mine's Eric Sark."

Dreading another personal question, Blera bent low by the table-edge to pick up the meat.

But Skookum, the most cunning as well as the most evil of the wolf-dogs, had seen it fall and stolen from behind the stove. He leaped as Blera reached for it and, losing it by the fraction of a second, slashed with his chisel-sharp fangs at her face.

The fangs fell short of the flesh, but met in the parka hood and tore it from her head.

Unmasked, the woman sprang away from the brute with a violent scream.

"Blera!" Sark's vicious voice thundered in the cabin.

Swift as his wolf-dog he sprang up.

For a moment he stared at her as across a gulf, his blue eyes blazing. Then the lightning-fire of his glance struck her companion.

"You can drop your hood, too, Cantine!"

With the ultimatum Sark's fingers slid back and seized the rifle lying in his bunk on the wall, for he looked to see a weapon flash in Cantine's hand and guessed that one of them had traveled his last trail.

But Blera was upon him on the instant, pressing down the gun.

"You can't harm us, Eric! You can't harm us!" she declared hysterically. "You can't touch us here, people you've broken bread with under your own roof. You know that's the Northland law!"

Again Sark stared at her as across a gulf and dropped the rifle on the bunk.

"You're right," he admitted slowly, nodding his head as if she had expounded some all-powerful decree. "Though laws aren't worth a Siwash curse to you two, they are to me. You're safe—for the night. Because now I savvy that 'brother in the Miner's Range' was only lyin' bluff."

"But look here, Sark," whined Jose, "we——"

"Stop right up! I'd sure palaver with a murdering Sundowner. I'd sure palaver with a cannibal Hoonah. But I won't palaver with you. I'm telling you you're safe under this roof. Out from under it you take your chance. I'll give you an hour's clear start in the morning, and then, by thunder, look out for me! Now jump into that back room quick, the both of you. Jump in, I say, for fear I forget I've broken bread under my own roof with you!"

The intensity of Sark's passion heaved and tore at his mighty chest and vibrated in his smashing voice.

They did not want him to forget. They had the temporary saving grace of the night hours. Much might perhaps be accomplished in those hours, and with that idea in their degenerate minds Cantine and the woman slunk into the logged-in annex and shut the door.

As if he were already slamming lead into Cantine's body, Sark slammed stick after stick into the stove.

Then, although it was still early in the evening, he blew out the candle and threw himself upon his bunk, lying on hip and elbow, resting his head on his hand and staring like a graven image at the flame-dance on the darkened walls of the cabin.

Blera, peering through a chink in the back-room door, watched him thus hour by hour. It was a strange and weary vigil, but on after midnight his head slipped down from his hand.

"Jose," she breathed, "he's asleep. Now's our chance. But we have to have the rifle to make our get-away good. Then you can stand him off. I'll take the gun. I'm lighter than you, and the slab floor's awful creaky."

Cautiously she slipped out of the back room and as cautiously, inch by inch, edged across the main room toward Sark's bunk.

Her figure as she crept was now lost in shadow, now etched out faintly by the leaping flamelight. She moved apparently without stepping, with the peculiar gliding grace that is the inheritance of North-born people.

The irregularities of the slab floor seemed to lose stability, to become fluid and flow under her feet like waves in a rapid. Not once did her moccasined toes strike knot or seam. Not once did the limber slabs shriek as they bowed and sprung. Not once did the sleeping huskies stir from their dreams by the stove. She reached the bunk, and her mobile fingers closed on the weapon.

Sark faced outward as he slept.

The rifle lay on the blankets between his back and the wall, free of his touch except where his shoe-packed foot curled over the heel of the stock.

Blera had the rifle by the barrel, and slowly, with a motion so gentle as to be scarcely perceptible, she began to twist loose the butt.

She had nearly succeeded when she saw the twitching of muscles round Sark's closed eyes.

Swiftly she released the weapon and with a lithe swing of her body stretched herself along the outer edge of the bunk. Her arms were about Sark's neck, and her voice was whispering in his ear when he half awoke.

"Eric," she whispered hurriedly, hysterically, "I've come back—stolen out of there while he slept. We got to go away—together. He was never——"

But Sark awakened fully.

"You cursed vampire!" he gritted. "Get off. Get away from me. I don't want the touch of your hands. Aren't you seeing you're poison and pollution to me?"

He half arose on one knee, roughly thrusting her from the bunk, and even as he repulsed her, the touch of her arms brought the thrill of another day, a day when his hours had been full of dream and desire, of marvel and of miracle, when Blera had been a splendor and a vision to him and lain in honor by his side.

For a reeling moment he saw not this woman who was poison and pollution to him. His eyes were fixed, seer-like, upon the panels of those vanished days, upon the words and smiles and deeds and delights of another woman tapestried in golden story upon the snow-white curtain of the North, days before he had come into the companionship of Tom Bassett and discovered the love that passeth the love of woman.

And that short moment of Sark's unwariness was his undoing and Blera's opportunity. Right before his unseeing eyes her swift hands grasped the rifle, and like another Delilah, turned Philistine against her Samson, she crashed the butt across his temple.

Sark's face turned blank. He quivered a little, poised on one knee, and collapsed in the bunk.

"Jose, quick!"

But she did not need to cry. Cantine had seen from the chink in the back-room door and run as she struck.

"Blera, you didn't——"

"No, no! Only stunned! And he's stirring already. Be sharp! Get the dog-harness. Down, you brutes!"

The awakened dogs had sprung up snarling, but Blera had a formidable weapon in the rifle, and she bludgeoned them on the heads with the butt. Jose, too, sprang for the long-lashed dog-whip, coiled on pegs on the wall, and flayed them into subjection.

"Now the harness, quick, Jose!"

Still using the butt of his whip to keep the victory already gained, Cantine threw the harness on the ugly beasts and haled them out into the piercing cold. Blera tossed down the sled up-ended by the door. Rapidly they traced in the huskies, whining resentfully at being lashed and dragged from the warmth of the cabin out into a temperature of fifty-five below, and cast themselves on the sled.

"Mush!" roared Cantine, bringing down the whip.

Under the dreaded lash the shivering team dashed down the bank and headed up the ice of the Klokhok. The steel-shod sled-runners shrieked a shrill tune. The ice boomed to their flying passage.

High in the heavens overhead flashed the brilliant stars and the mid-Winter aurora. There was in the hearts of Blera and Jose no remorse, no regret, not even pity. There was only devilish recklessness and the sheer exultation of escape. Continually they urged on the dogs to greater speed, lashing them till Skookum the leader flung up his nose as he galloped and howled a protest.

And challenging Skookum's howl, from around the abrupt bend they were taking at express-train speed broke the tumultuous cry of many wolf-dogs on the arctic night.

As if suddenly revealed by a lightning flash Jose and Blera glimpsed them right ahead, the murderous hunt-pack from Tutchi's Village sweeping the river-ice one hundred strong with one lone cross-fox straining from their jaws. An instant they glimpsed them, then in the belly of the bend, fox, team, sled and hunt-pack collided in a heap.

Cantine had loosened his grip on the sled to grasp the rifle in defense, and the smashing impact catapulted him clear into the heart of the horde.

One moment Blera watched him sink in a sea of bristling fur and slavering fangs before she beheld the same sea surging upon her, the sea which was the concrete force of the inimical wild, strong, sure, more ruthless even than the persecuting Bassett or the avenging hand of Eric Sark.

TWO weeks later, Tom Bassett, returning from Dawson City up the Nordenskold River and swinging through the night down the Klokhok River to his partner's cabin on the Nordenskold Trail, drove over a rattling heap of débris at the first bend above the Klokhok's mouth. Curiously he swerved his sled back to investigate, and one brief look before he whipped on showed the remnants of a broken sled mingled with gnawed husky and human bones glistening white under a rising moon.

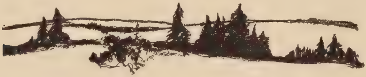
He whipped on fast and burst into the cabin upon Sark who with a bandage over a deep cut on his temple was forking bacon from a frying-pan on the stove on to a plate.

"Eric," Tom greeted with a tremor of relief in his voice, "I struck somethin' upriver, and I wasn't—well, sure, you know!"

"I've had visitors since you left," replied Sark grimly.

"Eh?" Bassett put out a sympathetic hand. "But Eric, you didn't——"

"No," returned his partner, gripping the extended hand, "the hunt-pack saved me the trouble. Sit in and have supper!"



In The Grip Of The Minotaur

A Four Part Story

– Part I –

by Farnham Bishop And Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

FOREWORD

SOUTH of the clustering Ægean Isles, half-way between Greece and the rich Asiatic shore, the island of Crete lies in the bosom of the Mediterranean. Egypt is far to the southeast of it, glorious in memories; and still the huge temples of the Pharaohs lay their mysterious enchantment on the minds of men.

It was but yesterday that British genius uncovered, in the land of Minos, the fossil bones of an empire mighty as that of the Osirian Kings, and richer than Nile-girdled Thebes could boast. Unknown and undreamed of till our own day, the enormous foundations of Cretan Knossos speak of a civilization of centuries, founded, not on legions and on conquest, but on trade and the might of invincible navies. Mycenæ was its colony, Troy its dependent.

Over the broken relics of its majesty, tongues of fire have written a script which we can read but imperfectly. Who burned these royal cities, these kingly treasure-houses? What daring conquerors crushed the swarming fleets and descended with tempestuous swiftness on the fair abodes? No man knows; but this much is certain: the destroyers were sea-farers, with ships well-manned and numerous; for no danger could threaten Crete until the galleys which were her strength had been swept from the Mediterranean.

Far away, in the north of Europe, merchants of another race brought rich cargoes into the ports of the North Sea and the Baltic, and carried on their traffic overland through Russia to Greece and the Eastern world, centuries before the vikings made their fierce raids on the southern coasts. They, too, were skilled mariners and terrible fighters, masters of the sea.

In these daring seamen of southern Scandinavia, the authors have seen possible rivals and enemies of Crete. The fleets of Minos could not have endured the competition of other powerful traders; and the Northmen were ever ready to fight for the goodly markets of the world. It might even be that these, the forefathers of the men of Wisby, Throndheim, and Bergen, met and received rebuffs from the Cretan lords of the Mediterranean. It may be that the stout ships of the North gathered, swept down on the painted galleys of Minos, and emptied their raging swordsmen on the Cretan coast.

However this may be, somehow, at the height of their beautiful, cruel culture, the fair palaces of Knossos and Phæstos were suddenly sacked and burned. With them, the glory of the Mediterranean departed. The strong hand of the Minoan king relaxed, the civilization of the south disintegrated; and for ages to come, darkness lay over the lands until the light of Corinth, Sparta, and Athens dispelled its barbaric gloom.

But still the memory of this marvelous land haunted the Mediterranean world. Long after, the Grecian traveler Herodotus learned from Egyptian priests of a mysterious kingdom in the sea, founded by the gods, and destroyed by an unparalleled catastrophe.

Magnified by repetition during the centuries, the priestly tale told of a vast land, peopled by a race supernally wise, and rich beyond conception. Even to our own days the legend has lingered, and men's imaginations still stir at the mention of the vanished children of the gods, in the land of lost Atlantis.

CHAPTER I

THE *GRAY WOLF* COMES

ROUND the sharp elbow of the little bay shot a long, gray hull, urged by the brisk wind in her swelling canvas and the sturdy arms of forty rowers. As the wolf's head on her stem-post swung its gaping, blood-red jaws round in a half-circle, the single square sail spilled the wind, flapped idly, and was quickly lowered and stowed away, for the keelless northern galley of 1400 B. C. could not tack.

The voice of the shore-watch rang out sharply through his cupped hands, in the hybrid patois of the Mediterranean traders.

"Who are ye who float hither with wolf-painted sail and wolf on your prow? Whence come ye? Is your errand peace or war?"

Two tall figures rose from the ship's belly and mounted the little half-deck forward, where, steadying himself against the shrouds, one roared reply:

"We are Northmen, come from afar. We are no sea-thieves, but honest traders, bringing amber from our own shores and tin from the Isle of Mines to Troytown-fair. He who stands by me is our master—Ragnarr, son of Sigmund, King of the Island Goths. If we are welcome, speak; if not, we go hence as we came."

As the shoreward wind bore the words to him, the coast-guard raised a horn to his lips and blew it twice. Out of the tower behind him came a file of armed men who ranged themselves in a close line along the short beach. But, as the lashing oars brought the galley closer in, the shore-watch cried:

"Ye are welcome, and may the peace ye bring be with you!"

The rowers drew in their dripping blades, the heavy stone anchor rumbled over the side and two boats were launched in quick succession. Into the first clambered the tall figures of captain and spokesman, followed by six rowers; the second and larger boat was quickly filled with small bales handed over the side, their bulk wrapped in stout woolen cloth, bound with ropes of bast.

When these were stowed, the boat was manned by eight sailors, each detaching a shield from the ship's gunwale as he came, and slinging it over his left shoulder by a leathern thong. Shoving off swiftly, the seamen propelled the boats shoreward till they grounded, and the two leaders leaped down to the beach.

The spokesman was a vast hulk of a man, with a chest like a rampart, long, knotted arms, and fierce, wise, old eyes. A bushy red beard, slightly tinged with gray, hung down in two forks over his breast.

He who was called Ragnarr was a hand-breadth taller, but slenderer, with the agile grace of youth. Like all his race, he was fair and his blond hair streamed down over his shoulders. Wide, piercing eyes gazed from a well-tanned face; cheeks smooth, save for a white scar reaching from nose to chin, and only partly obscured by a long yellow mustache. A great sword hung in a gold-mounted scabbard of leather at his side, and in his right hand he carried a long bronze-headed spear. All the strangers wore plain bronze helmets, coarse woolen shirts and tunics, and strips of the same material wound about their lower legs, down to the soft-leather shoes.

But the shrewd-eyed coast-watch needed no fine clothes to tell him who was in command and how to address him.

"Prince Ragnarr," he said in deferential tones, "all who come here with peaceful thoughts are welcome, for our people are eager for honest wares. But none may enter the grounds of the fair till he has left his weapons, either in his ship or at the Temple of the Mother. I tell you this now, that you may not unwittingly break the laws of the land."

"It is a good law," answered Ragnarr, "and one that I know of old for it is observed at fair-times in our land also. But can our wares be boated up this river or must my men carry them, for they are heavy?"

He pointed to the wide Scamander, which, flowing down through the fertile plain girding the new-built city of Troy, entered the harbor not a hundred yards from the wolf-ship's mooring.

"The current is strong, but men like yours should find it easy," answered the shore-watch, looking up with admiration at the towering Northmen. "I am Kamas, Captain of the Shore, and I will go with you myself. Our king will wish to see such heroes, for doubtless you have strange tales to tell of the wide sea, and of the far-away land whence you come."

With an inclination of his head, Ragnarr again entered his boat, followed by Valgard and the Trojan, who delegated his charge to a younger officer. Just before the skiff was pushed off, one of the Northmen stepped out quietly and walked along the shore toward the ship, holding something under his mantle.

Seated together in the boat, the Trojan contrasted strangely enough with the blue-eyed giants from the north. He was short, dark, and clean-shaven like almost all his race, wiry and athletic, with broad shoulders and a slender waist, outlined by the soft, girt-in tunic. His black hair curled down below the edges of his red-plumed helmet and his eyes were long, prominent and heavily lashed. Unlike Ragnarr as he was, he was even more unlike the massive and ruddy Valgard, whose face was as fierce and keen as that of the war-god of his race.

THEY rowed on silently for a space, till their boat, the foremost of the two, rounded a curve of the river, and the undergrowth which had lined the bank was left behind. Then, as if a curtain had been thrust aside, they saw a fair, green plain, above which, reddened with the last rays of the setting sun, the great citadel of Troy rose from the massive walls that crowned and girdled its sustaining hill.

The Northmen raised an astonished cry. Ragnarr, turning to the captain, said in an awe-struck voice:

"Cities have I seen, and strongholds, in many lands, but never did I see or hear men tell of such an abode as this. Your king must be greater than all other earthly rulers, for surely the home of the gods must be like this city."

Kamas smiled, but made no answer. After his own first involuntary exclamation, Valgard strove mightily to appear unimpressed. He was older than Ragnarr's father and had not traveled for nothing.

Now they came to a stone quay and Kamas bade them disembark.

"Your goods will be safe enough here," he said, "for none but the king's household use this landing and it is well guarded."

He spoke truly. No sooner had the first sailors set foot on the stone steps than a file of spearmen appeared and ordered them to stand. But, at a sign from Kamas, their officer bowed and led off his men as quickly as they had come.

It was now dark, and as they took the paved road leading up from the water, lights flashed out in all parts of the city. Outlined against the glow, a huge wall loomed like a cliff before them. No cressets flared on the parapet, no lighted loopholes starred the black bulk of tower and curtain and bastion. Nor was there the slightest sign of gate or gateway when the Northmen came, unchallenged, to the end of the paved way; only the solid wall.

Then Kamas turned to the left and led them along the foot of the wall, which, after a score of paces, came to an end. A turn to the right, four paces inward, a turn to the right again, and the Northmen found themselves following their guide down an alley barely wide enough for two armed men or a loaded pack-horse, with the wall on either hand.

Suddenly the darkness before them changed to a yellow glare of torchlight, outlining blackly the stout bars of a metal grating barring the way. At the same time, a stir and rustle above and to the right drew Ragnarr's dazzled eyes upward to the platform of the outer wall. There the glint of helmets and arrow-heads told how ready were the Trojan archery to riddle the unshielded sides of the Northmen, packed helpless in the brightly lit alley below.

"Well trapped!" growled Valgard appreciatively, as he tried to shift his broad shield to his right arm without letting go of his long spear.

But Kamas spoke a word in the Trojan tongue, the grating was swung wide by unseen hands, and they passed round the angle of the inner wall and entered the city.

To the left a broad street opened out before them; to the right rose a tall, white temple.

"Here you must leave your weapons," said Kamas, "for this is the Temple of the Mother. I myself shall see to it that your arms are safe, Prince Ragnarr, and in particular that mighty sword, which must be the gift of some god."

But Ragnarr answered:

"Look more closely, friend Kamas, and you will see that my scabbard is empty. I do not doubt your good faith, but that sword is indeed the gift of a god, who imposed on my race, his descendants, the command that the blade should never leave our kindred, even for a moment; otherwise our house and people should perish. I left it behind, therefore, with my foster-brother, whom I ordered to quit the last boat when you told us of your custom. As we pulled up-stream, I saw my men row out from the ship and take him back to it, carrying the sword with him."

"It is wise to obey the commands of the gods," said Kamas, "but you could have trusted me, my prince."

So saying, he led on through a narrow thoroughfare past the face of the temple, till they came to its entrance. A broad stairway led up to a brilliantly lighted entrance, flanked by pikemen, drawn up on either side of the stairs, and archers at the top.

Through this doorway they passed into a broad court, flagged with great close-fitting slabs of polished stone. Iron rings, set into some of these, hinted at trap-doors leading to vaults below.

The temple, lighted so well without, was dark within. A solitary torch gleamed at the very back of the single court which formed the interior and shone full on the face of a great statue of bronze, representing a tall and majestic woman, clad in sweeping robes but bare-bosomed. A mitered crown adorned her head, and her eyes were two great amethysts.

Kamas prostrated himself and the Northmen followed his example, Valgard muttering that it was well to placate the gods of a country where one hoped to tarry safely, but that he called his own gods to witness that it was no derogation of their majesty.

Arising, Kamas pointed to the low and broad stone altar before the goddess, its outlines barely visible in the gloom, on which lay many faintly glimmering objects.

"These are the arms of the common merchants," he said. "But yours shall be better cared for."

Stooping, he pressed one of the stones in the side of the altar. It turned on its center, revealing a cavernous opening.

"I pray you, let your men lay their weapons here," he said, and Ragnarr spoke a few words of command in his native tongue.

Readily the sailors complied, after which Kamas led them out through the great entrance and down the road back of the city wall, to the broad street which led to the citadel from the western gate. This street was full of Trojans, taking the air and waiting till their houses, heated like ovens by the long day's sun, became cool enough to sleep in. Here, in the lower wards, fish were being roasted over street-corner fires and sold by the skewerful, while circles of thirsty ones squatted round the tubs of crude beer, which they were sucking through straws to avoid the loose barley floating on the surface.

Longingly looked the seamen at the food and drink, and exchanged appreciative glances with the dark-eyed women who mingled freely with the crowd. But not a man of Ragnarr's crew lingered behind, for they knew their captain.

"Here," said Kamas, stopping before a large dwelling that seemed dark and empty, "is a guest-house where your men must remain till morning, for at night no strangers are permitted nearer the citadel."

The place was a low, one-story stone building, with a deeply recessed doorway. Kamas took a torch from a niche in the recess, lit it at the flare of the nearest door-light, unlocked the wooden door of the guest-house with a bronze key, and all entered. Here was a single large room, with a door in the rear leading to an antechamber.

Kindling the torches stuck in brackets about the walls, Kamas pointed to the numerous stools and mats ranged about the floor and then stepped to a sunken closet in the wall. Holding his torch before it, he showed fruit, bread, and wine-jars to the staring sailors, then turned toward the door.

"If it please you, my prince," he said to Ragnarr, "it is time to wait on the king."

Here Valgard interrupted:

"I have traveled far and wide, O Kamas," he said in angry tones, "but never yet have I, the spokesman and kinsman of my prince, been forbidden to go where he goes, nor will I begin, at my age, to learn new customs."

But Ragnarr interposed:

"Strong men can break customs, but only the weak break discipline. If you go with me, who will keep these?" and he pointed at his men who were wrenching the plugs from the wine-jars, "from drowning their sea-thirst with half the ale in Troy?"

"You speak wisdom where Kamas spake folly," answered Valgard, turning on his heel.

"Take no notice of his bear's manners," said Ragnarr to the captain, as they left the house. "He growls at all times and is silent only when he bites. He loves me well and would keep by me at all times."

They continued their way in the same direction, following the street up a steep slope, cut at intervals by broad concentric avenues, dug out of the hill itself and faced with polished stones. The spaces between these avenues formed terraces covered with buildings, the richer of stone, the poorer of sun-baked brick.

At every street corner the two encountered the same dense crowd of people come out to enjoy the cool night-air after the stifling day. All who met the pair stared open-mouthed at Ragnarr's tall, barbaric figure.

All at once, as they were elbowing their way through the thronged intersection of the street with one of the avenues, an approaching voice cried out in a high-pitched, nasal chant. The crowds divided to right and left, squeezing as close as they could to the walls of the buildings on either side, and all tongues were silent even in the midst of speech.

Then was heard the sound of pattering feet and round the curve of the avenue came two half-naked runners, carrying wands of office. They were followed by an open litter, borne by four brawny blacks clad in leopard-skin kirtles.

Like sheaves bending in the wind, the long, dense lines of the multitude sank to their knees in one motion, the rustle of their garments drowning out the foot-beat of the runners. Kamas knelt with the rest, but Ragnarr, gazing at the litter in frank curiosity, suddenly saw a vision that caused him to stand as still as the heart in his own breast.

The light from the torch on the house-corner behind him fell full on the face of the occupant of the passing litter, so that it was outlined against the dark like a cameo. It was the face of a young girl, her profile clear, well-shaped and of exquisite beauty.

For a moment Ragnarr stood immovable, his eyes fastened on that face, till it grew dim and faded out from the rays of light. Then he became aware that all the people had risen, and Kamas was plucking him by the sleeve. He turned to follow, then stopped again and asked his guide:

"Who is she who passed but now, whose beauty made all the people bow before her? Is she a goddess?"

Kamas looked up at him curiously and answered with a shade of amusement in his voice:

"It is Ilia, daughter of Dardanus our king, and the people bowed before her royalty."

Ragnarr moved slowly forward, his eyes rapt, his lips murmuring softly: "Ilia! Ilia!"

CHAPTER II

ILIA

SOFT-FOOTED attendants bore away the empty dishes, and, returning, filled the slender cups with the amber wine of Sidon. Then the white-haired king, his shrewd old face alight with interest, turned to the grave-featured youth at his right and said:

"It is indeed a wondrous tale, Prince Ragnarr. I have seen men of your race who had come by the overland road, showing their wares at the market in Mycenæ; but their ships have never before ventured the long voyage to our seas. And you say that your people have many such ships?"

"In our land, O king," answered the Northman, "every village furnishes a galley, every district a host, to my father's ventures in peace and war. We could muster two hundred ships on our island, and can draw as many more at need from our allies on the mainland."

The king pondered this statement a moment, then turned again to his guest and said, with a courteous gesture: "We have wearied you with our curiosity. Let us go, if you please, to my apartments."

At once he rose and all at the table stood up, bowed their heads, and remained standing till the king and the stranger he had honored had passed from the columned hall. At the door the two sentries drew aside and raised their shields in salute.

The king preceded Ragnarr down a long corridor to a curtained entrance, through which they passed together. Ragnarr then found himself in a stately chamber, paneled and roofed with cedar, the ceiling being supported by graceful shafts of the same wood. Seating himself on a richly carved armchair of Egyptian workmanship, the king waved his guest to a divan opposite, where the light of a perfumed torch fell full on his face.

"I have dangerous neighbors," King Dardanus began, picking his words slowly. "Certain matters make it inadvisable for me to tell their names, but they have been troublesome ever since it seemed good to me that our power should expand. I built new walls for my city, and they bribed the contractors to furnish poor stone. I increased the size of my armies, and they—well, they interfered with my supply of metal, for the mines are in their hands. If I could find a strong, determined man, with some force at his back, it might be profitable to him."

Here he paused and looked at Ragnarr keenly. The young man was listening with grave interest, but his features showed nothing more.

"The man for my purpose must be a merchant, with an eye for good weapons," continued Dardanus, speaking with slow emphasis. "His ears must be open and his lips shut; he must sail to and fro between here and—certain ports, with cargoes of whatsoever I may specify, and must carry large sums in gold and silver to pay for the things which I require. Naturally, he must be prepared both to resist pirates and repel the curious."

Still Ragnarr made no sign, and the king spoke on:

"The rewards would be far greater than the income of the richest trader, to compensate for the lack of fame and safety in the enterprise; for, of course, my name and that of my city could not be brought into the matter."

As the young man was still silent, the king cleared his throat and began again:

"If you know such a man, I should be most grateful if you would bring him to me, especially if he were one of your race. You are silent and strong, and such must my servants be. In the meantime——"

He broke off and stared at the curtain. Ragnarr's eyes followed his gaze and saw a dainty white hand on the fold. Next instant the curtain was thrust aside, and a lithe, supple form stood before them. It was a girl of some seventeen or eighteen years, her white garments clinging to her shapely figure, her black hair streaming down about her hips.

Her beautifully rounded arms were bare to the elbow. Her complexion was much lighter than that of most of her people; the features small and daintily molded, the chin rounded and dimpled, but firm and strong. Her great brown eyes were fringed with sweeping lashes, and the red of her lips showed even in the half-light. As her glance fell on Ragnarr she stopped, eyes opened in surprise, and her face flushed to the pink of a Persian rose.

"Forgive me, father," she said in soft, sweet tones. "I believed you were alone."

But she made no move to go, and her eyes were fixed on Ragnarr, who had risen and stood riveted to the floor, staring in mute astonishment; his breast heaved and his face showed both admiration and wondering recognition. The king made a gesture of resignation.

"Remain, my daughter," he answered. "This is my honored guest and, I hope, my friend, Prince Ragnarr, heir to a great and powerful kingdom in the distant north. Lord Ragnarr, this heedless child is the Princess Ilia, whom the gods gave me last of all my children. It is a pretty lass, but somewhat wilful."

The princess advanced a step, her hand held out in greeting.

"My father's friends are ever welcome

to me," she said. Ragnarr strode forward, his face red with embarrassment, bent over the small hand and kissed it, but found no words. Neither seemed able to look away from the other, the girl surveying his mighty stature and clear, handsome features, the man's worshiping gaze fixed on the beauty of her face. King Dardanus took in the situation with shrewd, twinkling eyes.

Ilia turned to the king, still glancing covertly at the Northman from the corners of her long-fringed eyes.

"I shall wait on you in my mother's chamber, my father," she said, and with one swift last look at the stalwart Northman, vanished behind the curtains.

Ragnarr drew a long breath, and swift resolve was written on his face.

"One who seeks such a man as your majesty has described," he said, "would find a faithful servant in me."

CHAPTER III

TROY FAIR

"SIXES again! My luck holds, lads." The dapper little gambler from Mycenæ, deftly palming the dice, substituted two others, which he shoved over to one of his opponents. These were raw-boned, sheepskin-clad lumbermen from the Euxine camps who had come to the Troad with timber floated down the Straits. As their speech showed, their race was closely akin to that of Ragnarr and his Northmen.

One of the pair sullenly untwisted the coil of silver from his upper arm and threw it down in front of the Mycenæan. It was clear that he had no more to lose. As he rose, however, the wine-shop door burst open and in stalked a long line of his fellows, one after the other.

The foremost took in the situation at a glance.

"Plucked, Bikki?" he roared out in a voice already mellow. "Sit down again, you oaf, and play till you strip him of silver, earrings, and shirt."

Bikki spread out his hands, indicating the completeness of his defeat.

"But we have more, lad!" cried the newcomer, clinking a sack of silver counters, which, unalloyed and unstamped, formed the ready money of the land. "He has had all our skins from here to Cyprus, but we have him now, and he shall pay."

So saying, he dumped the contents of the sack out on to the floor in front of Bikki, then stepped behind him and leaned against the wall. His fellows grouped themselves around him and watched with intense absorption.

Counter after counter found its way into the pouch of the clever sharper, and anger and discontent settled down on the lumbermen's faces. They were too wrapt up in their own gloom to heed the lively passages between the Syrian with the gaudy headband and the one-eyed Sicilian vender of clay figures, who were indulging in satirical personal comments intended for the ears of the blowzy barmaid. She smiled at each impartially, then turned to wink at a tall sailor, who immediately ordered a pitcher of the finest wine.

Suddenly an inarticulate roar arose from a near-by bench, which encircled a large beer-cask with its curving ends.

"You have said enough, you filthy, naked swine!" cried a mighty-shouldered Northman, thrusting one ham-like fist close to the nose of a smiling Egyptian. "You have heaped on me ill names, you have called my people fleabitten barbarians, and I answered you with pleasant jests. But when you dare to revile my lord Ragnarr, calling him timber for your beggarly Pharaoh's footstool, you try a patient man too far. What deeds has this Pharaoh done that you rate him so highly?"

"You shall hear," answered the Egyptian; and drawing from its case a five-stringed instrument of harp-like shape, he placed its side against his olive-colored body, and struck it resonantly.

"Hark to the deeds of the godlike Amenothes!" he sang. "Hark how he whelmed the peoples in battle, how he ate up the children of the distant lands!"

A wild, stirring chant it was, its minor melody weaving in and out with varied phrase, the strophes interspersed with the repeated refrain—

"He smiteth them with his crescent ax, his glittering, moon-shaped ax!"

With a swift blow the Northman dashed the instrument from the singer's hands, the strings shattering with a vibrant wail.

"This is enough of axes!" he cried, his eyes shining with the light of battle. "Be silent, and hear a man sing of a sword!"

Swelling his deep chest, he opened his mouth, and in a crashing voice that made the wine-cups rattle on their racks, he sang the war-song of his house.

"The Song of the Sword!
Tyr!
The swift, surging death-flare,
The bright flame of battle!
The War-God hath forged it
Ages uncounted
Ere earth was shapen;
Hammered and hardened it,
In its hot metal
Bound the strife-demon,
Breathed his grim anger.
With cunning he shaped it,
With curses envenomed;
Whoso shall wield it
Ne'er shall be conquered;
Death shall go with him,
Follow him, drive him
To riches and conquest,
To glory and ruin.
Ne'er shall he fall
Till fate shall beguile him;
Then the wild demon,
Walled in its edges,
Shall wrench from his hand-clasp
And rend him asunder!

"Tyr!
The Smith Immortal
The gray sword hath given
In the fulness of time
To his son, the first Tyrfing.
Far o'er all earth-realms
His fame spread, unbounded:
The Sword in his strong hand
Swept all folk before him;
Till, heaped with honors,
In the height of his glory,
It wrenched from his hand
And rent him asunder!

"Tyr!
From father to son
It hath passed, as Fate doomed it,
And shall, till the anger
Of Tyr be averted.
Now a hero holds it
Hardiest of earth-folk,
Brave in adventuring,
Matchless in battle;
Ne'er shall he falter,
Nor fail of conquest;
While blade cleaves to handle,
While blood dyes the edges,
While gray sword slayeth,
And gray wolf devoureth,
His fame shall soar upward
As soars the swift eagle,
And shelter the peoples
'Neath the shade of his pinions.

"This is the Sword-Song,
The Song of our People,
The Song of the Gray Sword;
The Song he hath taught us—
Tyr!"

The harsh northern words meant nothing to many of his listeners, but a shout went up from the lumbermen. Bikki, his throw made, raised shining eyes to the bard and followed the final words of the song with a "Tyr!" that made the rafters ring. Then, looking down, he echoed this with a cry of anger and, seizing the Mycenæan by the hand, pressed the knuckles with his broad thumb, till the gambler's lips were compressed with pain, his fingers unclinched and a second pair of dice clattered on to the table. Still holding his man's hand in a grip like the pinch of a half-split log, Bikki whipped out his knife and cut through a die near the top, revealing a little disk of lead.

A savage, prolonged hiss shot from the lumbermen's lips, and they crowded about the two, muttering ominously. Three villainous-looking fellows stole out of the darkest corner, drawing crooked knives from their garments.

As the tavern-keeper rushed up and flung his arms around Bikki's neck, the foremost of the three slipped behind Bikki with ready blade; but a red-haired lumberman seized the ruffian's arm and flung him to the pavement. In the confusion that followed, the gambler freed himself and crept snake-like toward the door.

Bikki wrenched himself free from the encircling arms of the landlord and rushed after the Mycenæan, only to trip over a stool and knock himself senseless against the raised stone threshold, across which his adversary had just disappeared. The other lumbermen looked at each other in bewildered amazement, their slow-working brains befuddled with wine and dazed by the swiftness of events.

At that moment the excited bard, still tingling with the cadences of his barbaric song, flung back his head and chanted the last strophe once more, and the lumbermen swayed their bodies in drunken abandon to the rhythm. As the word "Tyr!" burst from the singer's lips, a frenzied light kindled in their eyes. With a loud shout of "Tyr! Tyr! Kill! Kill!" they burst through the tavern door and swept down the main street of the fair-grounds, leaving behind them a broad trail of overturned booths, torn fabrics, smashed pottery, spilled sweetmeats and rolling fruit.

Before them bolted shopkeepers and customers on panic-winged feet. Tearing down the sail-cloths that sheltered the booths from the sun, pulling up the long wooden tent-pins and aiming blows with them at everything breakable, human or otherwise, that came within arm-sweep, the frenzied lumberjacks cleared the street. Soon not a single figure could be seen for rods in front of them, while behind them stretched a broad avenue of desolation. Roaring their fierce chant of "Tyr! Tyr! Kill! Kill!" they bore down on the crowded center of the fair-grounds.

GROANS, hisses, and catcalls rose from the tight-packed crowd in front of the wooden scaffold. The discomfited jugglers hastily retired into the cloth shelter at the back, fearing more tangible evidence of the disapproval of their audience. At last an articulate voice rang out above the general tumult, and the entire multitude took up the cry in eager, insistent unison:

"Rala! Give us Rala! We want Rala! Rala! Rala!"

For several minutes the clamor swelled; then came a gaping, expectant silence. The curtain of the tent had stirred. Now a wild, prolonged cheer went up, as the lissom figure of a girl bounded to the very edge of the platform and stood there, bowing and throwing kisses. She was small, almost to tininess, and her supple, pliant form was perfectly revealed by her professional costume—a narrow cloth about the loins and a tight cap enclosing the hair.

When the tumult had died down an assistant came out, carrying a long sword. From his sleeve he drew a feather, tossed it into the air, and held the blade beneath it. The plume floated down across the edge, and without a perceptible check continued its fluttering course-in two pieces. Then he raised the sword, swung it round his head twice and made a lightning-like stroke at Rala. The crowd shuddered, but Rala, poised on tiptoe, lightly turned a complete back-somersault, landing upright at the extreme back of the stage. A sigh of relief escaped from the audience, followed by a crash of applause.

Now a second man emerged from the tent, his well-muscled body rippling with every movement. He advanced to the front and stood still, feet together and arms out horizontally from his sides. Rala, with a single bound, landed on his shoulders, stood there balancing a moment, and stooped till her hands rested in front of her feet. Then, slowly and carefully, her head resting on his, she swung her feet backward and upward till they pointed skyward. Her arms moved down and out at her sides, paralleling those of her partner; and her legs bowed out from her jointed feet till they formed an ellipse. Man and woman together formed a complete and nearly perfect *crux ansata*.

On her feet once more, Rala began an intricate and dangerous sword-dance, treading the measures with her hands, her body poised in the air above the dangerous blades. Suddenly there was a craning of necks, cries of alarm were heard, and the crowd began to melt. In a few minutes it was quite dispersed, men, women and children fleeing in a dozen directions.

Her two assistants scrambled down to investigate, then ran away swiftly, thinking only of themselves. Still Rala danced on. Absorbed in the joy of the skilled artist, she had not once looked at the audience, had interpreted their cries of alarm as expressions of fear for the dangers of her performance, and was quite unaware that she was alone. One, two more motions of the deft hands, and she hurled her body over the blades, lighting squarely on her feet in front of—emptiness.

There she stood, arms wide for her bow, and noticed for the first time that her audience had disappeared. A cry of bitter disappointment burst from her; she stood looking out over the desolate place with eyes in which tears of anger and mortification burned. Then, and not till then, her ears caught the sound of many feet and of rough, threatening voices.

Fear came into her eyes. She leaped down to the street and fell, rose, staggered and fell again with a sob of agony, as an intolerable pain shot through her ankle. Vainly she strove to rise, the shouts of the approaching mob ringing in her ears.

Then they burst upon her, a surging line of sheepskin-clad giants armed with long tent - pins. The foremost lumberman, whooping with triumph, stooped, passed an arm round her struggling body and lifted her to his breast.

Her lithe limbs writhed and the muscles stood out on her well-trained arms like lashing cords. In vain. The mighty clasp of the savage that held her did not weaken. In desperation she sank her teeth into his bare neck. With a harsh oath he dropped her and clapped his hand to the wound.

As she fell, another lunged at her and swung her to him. She struck him in the face with her clinched fists; then blackness closed in upon her.

RAGNARR stood in front of his booth, the covering of which was the wolf-painted sail of his galley. On either hand, the wrappings of the now-opened bales were stretched over oars to make two more tents, in one of which his men displayed pieces of red, white, or golden amber, in the other, ingots of pure tin.

The Trojan officer of police beside him had just said something highly amusing, at which the young Northman threw back his head with a shout of laughter. Suddenly he started and listened with straining ears, his hand clutching the officer's arm.

"It is trouble of some sort," he said. "There are many of them, by the voices. You will need men at your back."

The officer, whose city-bred ears were less keen, stood listening for a moment, then exclaimed—

"You are right! I go."

And go he did, at a swift pace.

Out of the tent came the grim figure of Valgard.

"Well, master!" he exclaimed. "The wind brings the sound of battle, and where there is fighting the wolves must follow."

"Here come sheep," answered Ragnarr contemptuously, as a knot of traders and mountebanks came rushing round the corner, their faces sallow with fright.

"Run for your lives!" gasped a fat Tyrian as he panted past. "Ten shipfuls of Euxine pirates are harrying the fair!"

"I hear no clatter of sword on shield," said Ragnarr calmly. "It is no battle, but a fair-time brawl. Still, do you, Tyrleif, keep the men together and guard the booths while Valgard and I go to look at these peace-breakers."

Swiftly the two Northmen strode to the street-corner, round which poured an ever-thickening stream of fugitives who swerved to right and left to let them pass. They turned the corner and saw dust rising and tents going down some fifty paces up the main street before the onrush of a mob of skin-clad men, waving long clubs.

"Wait, master," said Valgard. "We can not meet those lads unarmed."

"See what that tall fellow is carrying," answered Ragnarr. "Hasten!"

Up the street he dashed, and Valgard, willy-nilly, after him. The advancing mob saw two unarmed men speeding toward them, hesitated and stopped in surprise. Ragnarr strode straight to the man who carried Rala, seized him by the arm and roughly commanded him to put her down. The lumberman stared at him stupidly for a moment, then, realizing the import of his words, cursed him violently and tried to pass.

With one upward swing of his fist, Ragnarr sent the giant spinning, and wrenched Rala from his relaxing grasp. Swinging her to his shoulder, he started to give back; but with shouts of rage the mob pressed in upon him, shouting: "Kill! Kill!"

Ragnarr had but one arm free to defend himself and his burden, and it would have gone hard with him but for Valgard. To right and left shot the veteran's great knotted fists, and two men fell as if poleaxed.

Seizing a stake from the hand of one of them, Valgard placed himself beside his master and struck out with fury. His terrific blows never missed, and those in front began to give way. But the two Northmen were outflanked, and a club came down from the left, striking for Ragnarr's head. He threw up his free hand to ward off the blow, which fell on his heavy spiral armlet, shattering it to pieces. But it had checked the force of the blow, or his arm had been broken.

Hitting his man under the chin with all the strength of his arm, Ragnarr gave back as fast as he could. He stumbled, turned, and felt his back fetch up against something solid. It was the scaffolding of Rala's platform. Now he was safe on one side at least.

Valgard pressed close to him, striking rapidly and coolly. Some one in the rear threw a stake, which thudded against the wood beside Ragnarr's head.

"They have us now," said Valgard through his clinched teeth.

Above the tumult sang a strident sound, half hum and half hiss, and one of the lumbermen pitched forward, arms outstretched, with an arrow between his shoulder-blades. The sound came again, more loudly, and three others fell. Then, with a shout, a detachment of the soldiery who policed the fair charged in with drawn swords. Cries of pain mingled with yells of fury.

The mob made a short stand, then turned and fled in panic, but many were overtaken in mid-flight by the swift arrows. In five minutes the place was clear, save for the dead and dying who were picked up and carried off by the soldiers.

"Are you unhurt, my lord?" asked the officer—the same with whom Ragnarr had been talking when he first heard the uproar.

"I am well, but this maid seems somewhat injured," answered Ragnarr, bending solicitously over Rala.

"It is nothing but a contortionist," said the officer, "who makes sport for the rabble on street-corners. It is not possible that my lord risked his life for such as she?"

"Sir," replied Ragnarr, his cheeks flushed with anger, "in my land a woman is a woman, and men are willing to die for her, whether she be a peasant's girl or a king's daughter. You have done your work well, and I shall mention it to your royal master. Now leave us, for we have work to do."

He carried the girl to his booth, laid her under the shade of the sail and bathed her temples and her swollen ankle with wine. Her eyes opened. She looked up at him with tears streaming down her cheeks.

"I had fainted," she said, "but when I awoke you were holding me in your arms, and fighting. I heard what the soldier said, and it is true. You should not have risked your life for me; but it was noble, and I thank you—I thank you."

"Hush, child," answered Ragnarr. "You are hurt and overwrought, and must not talk till you are stronger."

He drew his gray mantle over her, for the evening breeze had sprung up and it was cold.

"I have poor quarters to offer you, but here you must stay till your ankle is well again and you can walk."

"Lord," she replied with a sob, "you have done me the first kindness I have ever known, and I shall never leave you while I live."

CHAPTER IV

THE COMPACT

"ARE you sure he is safe? He was not hurt?"

"Quite sure, Princess. A little thing she was, and no great burden for him."

"And is she beautiful?"

"As women of her sort are beautiful. Her face seemed a good one, though she was not clothed as a modest girl should be."

The two women stood in the Northeast Tower of the Citadel overlooking the little plain between the rolling Simois and the Scamander. The sun was not yet high enough to drive them to seek shelter from its heat, and it was pleasant to look out over the lovely valley and the low hills beyond to where the Straits broadened out into the blue Ægean. Ilia stood silent for a moment, wrapped in anxious thought.

"I must see him," she said slowly. "Has he reported the matter to the king?"

"Not yet," answered the attendant, "but I heard Acharsis, the captain of Archers, say that the Northman had been sent for and would come before noon today."

"Then he should be here within two hours," the princess said meditatively. "Do you go and watch for him, and send him to me before he goes to the king."

The maid bowed and descended the stone stairs.

Ilia leaned against the parapet, her chin resting in her cupped hands. She no longer saw the turbulent little river girdling the green bosom of the plain, nor felt the sea-wind that blew a loose strand of her dark hair across her cheek. She was thinking of the stately Northman, whose stern, fair young face had mingled itself with her waking thoughts and thrust itself into her dreams from that first moment when she had pushed aside the curtains of her father's chamber and seen him standing before her.

Why did she think of him so much? He was a stranger of uncommon stature and striking appearance, a figure one could hardly forget so soon. But that was not all. When her waiting-maid told her of the wild street-fight in which Ragnarr had stood in peril of his life, her heart had beaten tumultuously, as if something deep within her had been intimately bound up with his safety.

But what was he to her? Why should she care whether he lived or died? One life more or less mattered little in the cruel world in which she moved. In spite of herself, however, she had been deeply disturbed. And when she heard how Ragnarr had carried that woman of the corner shows in his arms, her head on his shoulder, and borne her to his own lodging, a sharp pang shot through her, and the beautiful day lost something of its brightness.

It was maddening merely to think that she, a princess of the blood of Teucer, should resent a kindness shown by a wandering stranger to a wretched little acrobat. Was she bewitched? Had this Northman, with his strange gods, cast a spell over her?

So absorbed was she in her disturbed fancies that she did not hear the soft scrape of leather-shod feet on the stairs, did not feel the presence behind her. A low, grave voice broke in upon her reverie—

"You sent for me, lady?"

She turned swiftly, the color mounting her cheeks to the very eyes. Yes, it was he. She was conscious of a strange thrill, half gladness and half fear, which she strove in vain to suppress. With an effort, she mastered herself.

"Yes," she replied. "I have been told that yesterday at the fair you did a deed of which I would hear from your own lips. You braved peril of death for a woman who was nothing to you. Such a sacrifice for one dearly loved—that I can understand; but I know no man in Troy who would risk a finger for a street-girl's life."

Her clear eyes searched his face.

"It was little enough for a man to do, lady," he replied, for the moment shy and embarrassed. "I have staked life and limb often for fame, even for riches; and is not a human life of much more worth than these?"

"I have often thought so," she answered, her admiration showing in spite of herself. "But I have heard no other say it till now. You are indeed a stranger among us, Prince Ragnarr. In this land into which you have come, every effort is strained to keep the breath in one's own poor body, and to win favors from the great. Some time I should like to know more of your land, and of your gods who give you such good and gentle thoughts. But tell me what you intend to do with this girl, since you can not keep her in a company of men."

Ragnarr frowned.

"I do not know," he said. "She is a good child and puts herself out to be useful, but I confess that I am troubled concerning her. My men cast their eyes upon her, and I fear for her safety. Besides, she keeps about me whenever she can, so that I scarcely have a moment for myself. If she had any one to care for her, I would have sent her to them before this; but she is friendless, and, moreover, she refuses to leave me."

Ilia laughed musically, a happy laugh. The sense of oppression rolled from her. If this girl were anything to the man who had saved her life, he could not have spoken of her as he did, nor thought of sending her away. She regarded him a moment with softly sparkling eyes and then laid her hand on his arm.

"You can find a way out of your own difficulty and serve me at the same time," she said gently. "I am in need of a companion who will speak to me of real things, who will tell me how my people live—their joys and sufferings, their hopes and fears. None are permitted to tell such things to me. I hear only what is agreeable, yet I know there are those in the world who are harassed, for I have passed through the city and seen faces on which sorrow had set its seal. This girl must have known such things, and she can help me to learn the needs of the people. Give her to me, and I will see that she lacks nothing. Will you do this for me?"

"Lady," answered Ragnarr, his voice strangely stirred, "I will do this, or anything, for you."

"Send her to me in two days, then," said Ilia, "for on the day after tomorrow, one of my waiting-women goes to her father's house. Now tell me, you who are so brave and yet so gentle, what have you to do with the dark plans of my father, who never gives his friendship save to those whom he means to use? I have not seen you more than a few times, but I know that you are of a metal too fine for his shaping."

"He has confided but little in me as yet, but I gather that there are matters of trading and fighting to be done, and these are my profession."

"But are you satisfied to imperil yourself, and the men who trust you, in another's quarrel? He must have offered you much gold."

"You do me wrong, lady," answered Ragnarr vehemently. "I am a king's son and take no service under any man for gold. My sword is my own, and I do not sell it."

"Ah," she said, with a little sigh of relief. "Then there is some weightier reason?"

"Yes, a reason that in my eyes outweighs life itself, gold and kingdoms."

"And you can not tell me what it is?"

Again her white hand rested lightly on his arm; her lips smiled. Her unconsciously intimate, gently pleading manner, overwhelmed him.

"Not now, lady, not now," he stammered. "But, by my gods, I shall tell you some time, if I live!"

She felt his arm tremble under her hand and drew back in a soft palpitation of fright which she did not understand.

A dry chuckle sounded behind them. Ragnarr turned around sharply, his hand instinctively at his empty scabbard. Then the fire died out of his eyes and confusion fell upon him. Ilia's head was bowed, her cheeks scarlet.

"Well, children," wheezed old Dardanus, "your talk must have been interesting to make you so blind and deaf. I have been standing here as long as a man might count six score, and I might have been a brick in this wall for all the respect you paid me. But now run to your mother, girl. The sun here is too hot for your dainty cheeks, though it can harm this weather-beaten Northman little."

With a dutiful bow, not unmixed with trepidation, Ilia swept down the stair, her fine head tilted a little proudly.

"Now, my young friend," said the old king, swiftly changing to a confidential manner, "it is time, is it not, I told you more of my purposes? But first, you have entered my service of your own free will, and of your own free will you may draw out again, if the thought of danger disturbs you aught."

"My lord," answered Ragnarr haughtily, "a hero is my father, and my mother was as familiar with the spear as with the distaff. I took my first pap on the point of a sword, and drank my first wine out of a skull. If you desire to lose my services, speak of danger to me but once more."

"Nay, nay, be not so hot with me," broke in the king. "If you love danger so, I can make her your constant companion, your bride. But this is the whole matter, and you may take it or leave it. As you know, Troy depends for its very life on the trade which is floated hither from all directions. From the northeast, timber is rafted down from the Euxine; slaves are borne to us from the south, amber from your own land, and tin from the Isle of Mines in the northern seas, while copper is carried—when it comes at all—from the island of Crete.

"Now follow me closely. Crete is the seat of a mighty empire which could crush me as a cat crushes a bird. I have a strong city and brave men, but of what avail is courage without weapons? I can not make swords and spears without bronze; I can not make bronze without copper and tin. Minos, King of Crete, levies a crushing tribute on me, and if I withhold it he keeps copper from me and forbids the Mycenæans to send me the tin which enters their waters. I have no ships of my own, and Minos's countless sails dot the wide waters of the Mediterranean. If after a time I am still defiant, he blockades my ports, and shuts out all things which come by sea. Then my trade dies and my people grow poor.

"If I had sufficient store of weapons for a long war, I could spit at him. Now, you are a daring seaman and have your own ship. I can not obtain the raw metal for my needs, but with your aid I can import weapons ready-made from Egypt, whose Pharaoh controls the copper-mines of Sinai. If I traded with him direct, Minos of Crete would know it, and, being mightier than I, could persuade Egypt to refuse to trade with me. But you are unknown in these southern lands. I will send you with secret letters to the Pharaoh Amenothes, and you shall contract to carry gold and silver to him, ostensibly for spice and alabaster, and bring back swords, spear-heads, and arrow-points of bronze."

"And then," interrupted Ragnarr, stirred to enthusiasm, "we can store food and water in the vaults of temples and palaces, shut ourselves within the walls, and defy this island tyrant!"

"Not so rash! Not so rash!" admonished Dardanus. "A war is not won so. We might hold out a year, perhaps, but his ships would shut us off from the world, destroy our trade, cut off help from without—even sail up the Scamander. And his sea-thieves, disembarking, would pillage our lands and reap our harvests. The bravest heart can not fight an empty stomach. And as long as Minos held the sea, we could wage only a defensive war, and his gold would attract great hordes of mercenaries from Egypt, Mycenæ, and the East. No, there is something more. We must beat down his shield before we can pierce his heart. We must destroy his fleet!"

He said this with a concentrated hatred, a fury, which transformed his cunning old face into a fiendish mask.

"How can you do this with no ships?" asked Ragnarr doubtfully.

"That is just the point, my good youth. That is your second task. First you set our craftsmen to work, till they have built a small trading fleet. Then you bring in many shiploads of arms from Egypt, till we have enough. Then you shall go back to your own people and induce them to send great merchant-fleets, to cripple this Cretan devil's commerce. Then he will swell with anger and think of war. But by that time, what with the ships of your people and those you shall teach us to build, we shall have a fleet which can break his navies and scatter his people to the four winds!"

Dardanus rubbed his withered old hands and chuckled in gleeful anticipation. But Ragnarr answered:

"There is one thing more, O king. What is my reward to be, if I accomplish all this? For it will be a long, hard task. My men are dear to me, and their lives are worth more than the gold and silver you spoke of. If my people are to be your cats paw, you must pay them. But my reward——"

"You shall be first in this kingdom, under myself," answered Dardanus. "You shall have wealth untold, and all your men shall be enriched from the plunder of our foes. Your name will be great and go down to our children's children as the savior of their race."

"It is not enough," said Ragnarr sternly. "I do not fight for gold, for I can win enough in trade; and as for fame, I have that in my own land already. But you have one thing which I value above gold and jewels, above fame and very life. If I sell you my sword, you must give me this."

"Anything, noble Northman, anything, saving only my crown itself," protested the king, with an understanding gleam in his eye. "Ask and you shall receive."

"Then this shall be my reward, if I can win it," said Ragnarr; "if I can not, I will ask for nothing. Swear to me that if I can win your daughter's love, she shall be mine so soon as your enemy is humbled."

"I swear it!" cried Dardanus, raising both hands heavenward in his ardor. "By our holy goddess, the Mother, I swear it!"

"Then our bargain is made," said Ragnarr, and seized the king's hand in a joyful grasp.

As he turned to descend the stair, the old man smiled knowingly to himself, and winked one cunning eye.

CHAPTER V

MORE THAN LIFE ITSELF

RALA knelt on the mat, grinding wheat in a stone mortar. Her lips were pressed together ominously, and her fine eyes were dark with sullen anger.

"I tell you I will not go, my lord," she declared. "What have I to do with that Trojan lady, with her well-bred ways and her finery? Did she save me from those filthy savages? No. Who did? You. It is clear, then, that since I owe my preservation to you and not to her, I must belong to you and to no one else. I shall stay with you till I die, unless—" and here her rage threatened to drown itself in tears—"unless you turn me away."

Ragnarr mutely implored the gods for aid.

"I do not turn you away, child. You are a good girl and have served me well. But——"

"Oh, fie, master!" she cried springing to her feet, eyes flashing. "Served you well! A good girl, am I? Am I no more to you than that? Your hound serves you well and is a good dog, but he gives you his soul and gets in return—the bones from your table, the scraps you are done with, your Worship's caress when you are pleased with him, and—a kick when you weary of him. I am no dog, but a woman with a heart like yours, a mind, thoughts, feelings to wound, eyes, a tongue——"

"No one denies that," groaned Ragnarr.

"And I tell you I am not to be driven away like a worn-out dog. You gave me life and more than life, and I shall stay with you, for something tells me that I shall yet return the gift."

She looked up at him imploringly, her cheeks wet with big tears.

Ragnarr shook his head perplexedly.

"No, child," he said after a moment. "I am not made of stone, and I realize that you are my faithful friend and servant;

but you can not remain here. You are among men who, though they love me and obey me, are, after all, no better than most men. I fear much that they may do you mischief. Besides, it happens that you can serve me best by serving the Lady Ilia, who also is my good friend."

Here Rala looked up, a dangerous gleam in her eyes.

"She particularly asked me to send you to her, and I gave my promise. Would you have me break my word?"

The girl's breast heaved stormily.

"I am a trouble to you!" she cried. "You hate me and would be rid of me! No, do not deny it! Well, I will please you. I am your slave, the dirt under your feet. I will fetch Valgard, who is fond of me. If he bids me go, I will obey. He will speak as he thinks, not as some fair woman asks him to speak."

She turned away and called Valgard's name. He came out from one of the tents, his massive figure filling the door, his face flushed and perspiring with the heat. It was true that the tempestuous little acrobat and he had become strongly attached to each other, both by the common bond of their affection for Ragnarr and by the strong cord that unites the hearts of all true adventurers.

"Valgard!" cried Rala. "Your master wishes to turn me out. The Princess Ilia has conceived the whim of having a girl of the people to serve her, and cajoled the simple man into promising to turn his poor slave over to her. What say you? Shall I go? Or shall I defy him for his own good and remain in spite of him?"

Valgard looked at her steadily, but with unwonted tenderness in his fierce old eyes.

"See, lass," he began, "you and I have one end in life, one task to perform. We are our lord's, and our sole reason for continuing to be is to obey him. If he walk on us, it is well. If he fondle us, well. If he bid us tear out our hearts and eat them, why, that is what we are here for. He did not wait and debate when your life and honor were at stake. You call yourself his. Then serve him as his spear serves. All is said."

The girl flung herself face down on the floor, sobbing piteously. Ragnarr stooped to comfort her, but Valgard thrust him back.

"Let be!" he whispered. "You can do no good. She will come out of it herself."

In a moment she sat up, humble and submissive.

"When shall I go, master?" she asked, her voice trembling.

"Tomorrow at noon, child. You could not be with me longer, in any case, for I sail at dawn of the next day."

Rala gave a cry, her hand at her breast. Valgard stared at him.

"May we know where, lord?" he asked.

"It is right that you two should know first of all," answered Ragnarr, "for of all that are with me there are none truer. Sit close by me, that other ears may not overhear. I go to Egypt, to arrange for a mighty undertaking."

So he told them all the story, leaving out only that which concerned his love for Ilia. Valgard took the affair quite as a matter of course, but Rala's face and gestures showed the liveliest terror and concern.

"Have nothing to do with this king and his quarrels," she begged. "Oh, if you had seen Crete, if you but knew King Minos, you would not lift a finger against him. He is the descendant of the gods, and they fight on his side. He always conquers, and his foes are taken and sacrificed to the Minotaur, to that which no man hath seen and lived to tell its shape. If you oppose Minos, you perish."

Ragnarr's jaw set and he squared his shoulders.

"Now you have done it, girl," said Valgard. "Our master fears nothing except fear. He will go now, you may be certain."

"Listen, my lord," Rala pleaded. "I was born in Sicily, and was taken as a slave by Cretans when but a tiny child. They trained me in all athletic exercises, for I was the daughter of a chief and doomed to be a sacrifice to the bull, which they worship. There are three degrees of the sacrifice: the first, when the harvest is good and fortune favors them, is the performance of the sacred dance by captive youths and maidens before all the people; the second, when fortune frowns, is the combat with a savage bull, which selected youths and maidens must endure unarmed, and the third is that of which no man may speak with authority: captured warriors and those selected by the oracle are offered up to the Minotaur, and none know how they die.

"I myself endured the bull-fight, and survived; and soon after escaped through the great drains of the palace and swam out to a passing ship that bore me to Tiryns, where my training in the bull-ring earned me a place in that strolling band of acrobats, dispersed by the mob from whom you saved me. But for you the Minotaur waits."

"I have sworn," answered Ragnarr, and strode out.

Valgard rose to follow him, but the girl caught him by the sleeve.

"You are my only friend," she pleaded. "I am nothing to him. But I tell you, Valgard, I love him, and if anything happens to hurt him, I shall die. Find some way for me to go with him! I can not let him go from me, not knowing what may befall. Death is better, a thousand times better, than waiting in the agony of uncertainty, and hopeless, hopeless longing!"

Valgard laid his hand tenderly on her head.

"Brave little comrade," he said, "I would give my shield-hand to help you, as Tyr did for the gods. But our lord wills it otherwise. We are but tools in his hand, child. Can you not be a true tool?"

She seized his knotty hand and kissed it.

"I will be true, comrade," she answered stoutly.

THE day drew toward its close, and the Northmen made haste to sell the rest of their wares before they were obliged to depart. Valgard and the seaman Tyrleif stood behind the counter in the principal booth, while beside them Hjalti, the bard, with nimble imagination, appealed to the crowd of prospective purchasers in lurid phrases. Having called attention to the rare beauty of the amber, holding now a red piece, now a golden one, up to the light to catch the fading beams of the sun, he began to descant on their virtues as amulets, swearing that they would keep off the fever, sunstroke, palsy, and the falling sickness.

One figure stood on the very edge of the gaping crowd that packed the street outside the shallow front of the booth, a figure that never moved, but kept its eyes fixed on the shadowy interior of the tent. It was a woman, her features wrapped in a voluminous veil which swathed her to the knees, effectively disguising face and figure. To her the gesticulating bard addressed himself in particular, declaring that the amber nodule which he held in his hand was a sovereign remedy for jealousy and barrenness.

Suddenly a shadow fell across the counter, and a hand struck the bit of amber from his fingers. Immediately the crowd made a rush for it, trampling and jostling each other in their eagerness.

"Liar!" thundered Ragnarr at the trembling Hjalti. "How often have I told you that honest wares need no lying tales to cheapen them? Go to your tent, and bide till I——"

A muffled cry rang out, and Ragnarr broke off, looking up swiftly. In the scramble for the amber, a tall Phoenician had trodden heavily on the foot of the veiled lady, who had fallen against the rude railing that protected the counter. The veil half fell from her face, revealing the features of the Princess Ilia.

Ragnarr started violently. Then, as she righted her veil, he sprang over the counter and drew her round the angle of the booth and in through the door.

"What do you here, lady?" he asked anxiously.

"Follow me," she answered softly. "This is no place to talk."

Calling to Valgard to keep the crowd back, he opened the door-flap again and they passed out swiftly. One or two of the more curious started to follow them, but Valgard's shout brought a number of sturdy Northmen who shoved these back none too gently.

Swiftly Ilia led Ragnarr through the main thoroughfare and toward the little grove on the bank of the Scamander. There, close by the water and shaded by a clump of plane-trees, stood a stone bench on which they seated themselves. The westering sun dyed the river in crimson stain, and the clouds were fringed with crimson and opal. In the gathering dusk, a slender figure crept up behind them unobserved.

They sat in silence for a while, then she spoke in slightly faltering tones:

"My father has told me that you are going to Egypt," she began. "I know something of his purpose now, for he is jubilant in his new hopes, and must unbosom himself to one whom he trusts. Alas, I feared he planned some dangerous task for you."

"Why did you fear it, lady?" he asked unsteadily. "Why should the peril of a stranger give you concern?"

She hesitated, then spoke:

"I suppose, because you are unlike other men. You seem above the evil and the intrigue in which we are forced to live, and your heart is too clean and gallant for a king to sacrifice to his bloody purposes."

She sighed very softly.

"Are they not necessary purposes?" he demanded.

"They must be, or you would have naught to do with them," she answered. "You would not do evil work, I know."

"How do you know that? Why do you trust me so?"

"Because my heart tells me that you are good, better than our men are, and truer."

"You do not come to dissuade me, then?"

"No. I come to bid you farewell, to say what I could not say tomorrow, in the sight of all men. I came to tell you that I have never known so kind and brave a spirit. We may never see each other again, and so I may say freely that you have brought new faith, new gladness, into a heart oppressed with the sordid, petty ambitions of a selfish court. My spirit is the better for you, Ragnarr."

He could no longer restrain himself; his love for her burst the bonds of control. He rose to his feet before her.

"As you say," he began, "we may never meet again. The sea is full of evil men and evil forces, and it may be that I go to the land beyond this life. Or the gods may perhaps be kind and bring me back again. I, too, can say now what I dared not say before: I love you, Ilia, love you with all that is within me. If I return, can you give your heart to me?"

She rose and put both hands on his shoulders.

"There is no concealment between you and me," she answered. "I have loved you these many days. I think I began to love you when first I saw you. Do you remember? You had just landed and Kamas led you through our streets. My litter was passing through the crowd; all others fell to their knees, but you alone remained standing. I saw you towering above them, and your face was so good, so free from the servile littleness of our men, that I felt my heart warm to you even then. You saw me, too, and I knew that you were not unmoved."

He gave a cry of joy and caught her to him. They clung together, lip to lip and heart to heart, while the dark closed in upon them. And now the golden moon came up and flooded the river with radiance. Gently, Ilia drew his arms from around her and pointed to the sky pulsing with the beauty of the stars.

"I must say farewell," she said.

"Let us go, my heart's beloved," he sighed. "If I stayed here alone with you longer, my own heart would fail me for the morrow."

They stepped out from the shadow of the plane-trees, and the moonlight fell full on them.

"Hark!" said Ilia softly. "What is that?"

"It was only the river plashing on the sand," he answered, his arm stealing about her waist.

But he was wrong. It was the sobbing of a woman.

CHAPTER VI

THE MASTERS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

IT WAS all-important for the success of the old king's plans that Ragnarr should not seem to be more than a wealthy merchant. He had been graciously received at the palace upon his arrival, but that was an honor accorded to all merchants of noble blood. Now that he was about to depart, however, any unwonted attention paid him would attract the eyes of the multitude of traders, foreign representatives, and spies who crowded the fair, and perhaps start a rumor which Crete might seize upon. He must go quietly, and from the fair-grounds, like any ordinary merchant.

His men were to enter Troy by the Southwest Gate, collect their weapons from the Temple of the Mother and march out under convoy to the street bordering the fair-grounds and thence west to the Scamander where their boats would be waiting. In conformity with this scheme, therefore, King Dardanus had caused Ragnarr to be summoned secretly to him that very night, only a few hours after he had parted from Ilia. Ragnarr took advantage of this summons to take Rala to the palace with him, and found occasion to see her safely into Ilia's hands.

After a tender farewell to Ilia, he sought the presence of the king. Having received the letters for the Pharaoh and a few final instructions from Dardanus, Ragnarr took his leave, reminding the king of his promise with his parting words.

Next morning he began his preparations for departure. The sail-cloth covering was stripped from the booth and loaded into the larger of the two boats. With Valgard and six oarsmen he rowed down to the ship, which the sailors, as soon as the unloading had been completed, had pulled up, sternforemost, on the sandy shore of the bay for a scraping and overhauling. Those left with the ship, about fifty men, had camped out on the beach and had been hospitably cared for as guests of the coast-guard, by special order of the king.

As soon as they set eyes upon their prince, the sailors raised a mighty shout of welcome, rushed to meet him, and crowded round to shake his hand with that free good-fellowship that characterized the relation of the Northman to his lord.

After greetings were said, Ragnarr and his men launched the ship. They swarmed first round the bow, then the stern, took hold, lifted mightily and thrust the wooden rollers under. All gathered round the stern, half on each side, their thick shoulders thrust against the planks, and shoved with main force. The vessel heaved, settled, then rushed down into the water.

Now some waded out, their hands on her new-pitched sides, and held her; others formed a chain from the shore and passed along from man to man the sides of salt meat, bags of grain, and crates of dried fruit whch lay piled up on the beach, having been ferried down the river by the king's orders, for their voyage. These were stowed carefully in the shallow open hold amidships, between the inboard ends of the rowers' benches, and on them, cushioned and held in place with reed mats which protected the provisions from rain and spray, were placed the clay jars of water and wine, their mouths sealed with clay paste, and stamped with the royal seal.

Then, by Ragnarr's command, all but Valgard, himself, and the crew of their boat, swarmed over the galley's sides, half to port and half to starboard, to maintain her balance. The oars were brought out and thrust into the rowlocks, and the ship rowed out to a safe depth and there anchored.

Bidding the fifty bend on the sail and remain on board till he returned in mid-afternoon, when he proposed to sail, Ragnarr and the others re-embarked in their boat and rowed back to the fair-ground, which extended through the long, narrow plain south of the city, westward to the Scamander.

KING DARDANUS sat in a gilded chair on the northern wall of his citadel, whence he could look out over the plain of Troy and the rolling hills beyond, to the azure waters of the Hellespont. A gorgeously embroidered awning of scarlet sheltered him from the almost vertical rays of the noonday sun. Ilia sat beside him, while behind stood Rala, fanning her new mistress with a long-handled fan of peacocks' feathers.

The old king basked happily in the warm, soothing air. He was aglow with mental and bodily comfort. The day was glorious, the view before his satisfied eyes was radiant with beauty. This was his city, with its gigantic walls, its temples and palaces, its bursting granaries, and coffers full to overflowing. Its men were his, their hands quick to seize sword or shield at his bidding. Best of all, he had found a mighty friend and ally in this valiant Northman who would bring to him the trade of his far-off land, reopen to him the commerce of the wide Mediterranean, and overwhelm his cruel enemy and oppressor, Minos of Crete. His cup was full, and he felt a deep sense of satisfaction in his fair daughter, whose white arms bound this brave deliverer to him with the chains of love.

A white dot rose over the far edge of the Hellespont. Dardanus chuckled softly to himself, seeing in the tiny, far-off sail a symbol of the numberless fleets which should come so soon to Troy, bearing the riches of all the world. He watched it grow larger and larger, till, as the ship that bore it tacked, a puzzled frown began to drive the smile from his lips.

The one white spot had suddenly become three! Rala, out of his sight behind the chair, quietly laid down the fan, shielded her eyes with her hands, and watched intently.

"Daughter," the king asked in a tone of fretful bewilderment, "can you make out the sails on yonder ship? My old eyes are deceiving me, I think."

"She has three sails, father," Ilia responded, "but I am not sure of their shape, at this distance."

"If it please you, my lord," interrupted Rala, her voice trembling with excited fear, "it is one of the long ships of Crete, with its three square sails and countless oars which flash in the sunlight."

Dardanus sprang to his feet, his face livid.

"Oh, the cunning dogs!" he shrilled. "Could they not wait another day? To come now, when the prince's galley is still bound in the port! Have they eyes and ears in the very walls of my chamber, to learn my purposes as they leave my lips?"

He strode up and down, gnawing his fingers. Suddenly the light of resolution came into his eyes. He clapped his hands and a soldier sprang round the corner of the wall and stood before him, raising his shielded arm.

"Go to Prince Ragnarr's tent!" cried the king imperiously. "Tell him to close his business as soon as he may, hasten to his ship and speed to his destination as fast as sail and oars will bear him. Be swift!"

The messenger bowed low and departed.

Ragnarr stood by his dismantled booth, superintending the labors of his men, who were busily packing away the small remnant of their wares and the money they had taken, in strong boxes of cypress. These were to be stored in the palace during Ragnarr's absence. Small bags of stout cloth, tied tightly at the mouth, bulged with disks of silver and gold. The knots which secured them were sealed with balls of clay, marked with the royal superscription.

One, crammed too full, had burst, and Valgard with two sturdy helpers was thrusting back the boldest of the crowd. It was necessary to keep these folk in check, for among them were many stout rogues who would dare much to snatch a handful of the shining pieces. Every now and then, one more forward than the rest would drop with a bloody crown under the blow of a long tent-stake. Poles and pins were being plucked up, and the cloths which had been spread over them were folded and bound securely.

"On the king's errand! Make way!" cried a voice.

The crowd parted to right and left, and the messenger of Dardanus, his limbs streaked with sweat and dust, stood before Ragnarr.

"The king greets you, my lord," he panted, "and bids you haste on your voyage with all possible speed. To your ship! His majesty hath spoken."

Turning on his heel, the messenger sped back through the crowd which again parted to both sides to let him pass.

Ragnarr called on his men, urging them to their utmost endeavors. Bales and sacks were thrust hurriedly into the chests, which were bound with heavy ropes and laid in order.

"Handle that painted jar with care, you lout, or you taste my knuckles!" roared Valgard. "There is mead enough left in it to wet our throats twice around before we see the ship!"

He turned swiftly and caught just above the wrist a lean brown arm that had thrust itself from the edge of the throng and snatched up a tiny jeweled box, Rala's parting gift to the old warrior. A quick movement of his fingers, a shrill yell of pain from the thief, and the hand hung limp and broken from the brown wrist.

Then a babel of wondering cries burst forth in a dozen different tongues. Shrill-voiced Egyptians clamored and pointed, sharp-featured men of Sidon gesticulated and chattered; all the multitude gave tongue at once, their eyes and leveled arms directed toward the river.

Up the channel of the wide Scamander came a ship, such a ship as Ragnarr had never seen before, half again as long as his own *Gray Wolf*. Narrow was her beam and high her sides, even in the waist, from which the lines of her hull soared upward to the forked stem-post and pennoned stern. Black was her paint from stern to shoulder, but the prow was a bright vermilion. Very many were the oars, and smooth their rhythm, but the greatest marvel of all was the three tall masts—yes, three—that towered above her deck. Each was crossed by a single yard, carrying what looked like a modern topgallant-sail, for unlike the ships of the Northmen, this craft had her canvas hoisted so high that a tall man could pass under it with shouldered lance, even though he stood on the raised fore-and-aft bridge.

Greatly did Ragnarr marvel to see men swarm up the ladder-like shrouds of the standing rigging, lay out on the yards, and quickly furl the three sails as the ship drew nigh to the landing place. The oars gradually diminished their beat till the dripping blades were tossed and held, while the two broad steering-oars guided her in to the landing. By the dazzling glint of the sun on her gilded masts and carven, inlaid railings, she was clearly the galley of some wealthy prince, some affluent sea-king of the South.

The ship was made fast to the stone rings in two of the granite posts of the fair-grounds' quay, a cleated gangway was lowered, and, two by two, some thirty marines disembarked at the double and drew up on the bank. They were men of uncommonly short stature, broad-shouldered and swarthy, almost copper-colored, with pinched-in waists confined in broad leathern belts. From these hung short broadswords in embossed scabbards. The hilts were of ivory and the pommels of silver.

Each man wore a conical helmet of polished bronze, a gorgeously embroidered waist-cloth above which shone the naked, coppery breast, and leathern boots reaching half-way up the leg. Some carried unbent bows in their hands and full quivers suspended over their shoulders; the rest bore long spears with leaf-shaped heads of bronze.

Down the gangway now strode two impressive figures, a young man and an old. The youth wore about his shoulders a rich mantle of scarlet caught up with a golden clasp; the hilt of his short sword was of pure gold, with a gleaming jewel set in the pommel. His shapely head was uncovered and his jet-black hair dangled about his cheeks in three long curls.

His face was handsome and his eyes insolent; a thin nose and two daintily curved red lips proclaimed the aristocrat. His companion, gray-haired and lantern-jawed, was evidently a naval officer of high rank. His helmet bore three red plumes, and an onyx-hilted dagger was fixed diagonally across the front of his girdle. At a curt command from him, the marines wheeled and marched up into the fair-ground, the two officers at their head.

Up the street swung the warlike band, shoulder to shoulder, chests thrust out, left arms swinging slightly as the booted feet came down in the crisp cadence of perfect drill. Neither to right nor left they looked, but straight ahead, with the eyes of men who know themselves for masters, in whatever company. The crowd made way for them as they came, giving the Cretans the full width of the street.

Ragnarr seethed with indignation. What were these swaggering fellows about, to violate the sanctity of the fair by carrying weapons within its precincts? How dared they trample on a world-wide custom, known to all men and violated only by pirates?

On the offenders marched, till they came to the corner of the Scæan Road where their path was blocked by Valgard, tying up one of the great bales. An officer ran forward and rudely tried to thrust the Northman out of the way. Valgard's great fist lashed out like the hoof of an angry stallion, and the Cretan dropped, stunned and bleeding.

The young commander gave a sharp order in his native tongue. The column jarred to a halt, except for the first four marines who sprang round their two leaders and closed in on Valgard with lowered pikes. With one bound, Ragnarr confronted them, spreading his arms between them and the glaring old warrior.

"By the hand of Tyr!" he thundered. "We are few and unarmed, and ye be many and well able to slay us with those weapons which ye bear here unlawfully. But, by the crown of my father, if ye lay a hand on any man of mine, some of you shall lie cold before this day's work is done!"

The crowd that had shrunk aside began to return, scowling at the audacity of the armed Cretans, but none daring to raise voice or hand against the intruders. Even the half-company of Trojan archers that policed the fair and now stood close behind the Northmen, hesitated to defend the sanctity of the place and the sovereign rights of Troy against the insolence of the masters of the sea.

"Remove those fellows!" cried the Cretan commander, and the four marines, who had hesitated at the intrusion of the blue-eyed giant, again rushed at Valgard.

But Ragnarr seized the foremost by the throat, swung him off his feet, and snatched the short sword from the Cretan's scabbard. Swinging the broad blade between Valgard and his foes, the prince kept the three at bay, while his voice rang in the ears of the multitude like a trumpet.

"Fellow-merchants!" he cried. "These men have broken your law, have trampled on your sacred privileges, bearing their wicked weapons into this holy ground. They even dare to threaten your lives, to seize your fellows from your very midst; and ye stand idle! If ye submit to this, which of you know that he may not be the next victim of these pirates' insolence? And ye, soldiers of Troy, do ye hesitate to avenge the affront to your king and your mighty city? Shall it be said that he who has tasted the salt of Dardanus died defending your laws, while ye stood by unresisting? If so, then be your land accursed and may its people perish, as cowards must, beneath the pitiless swords of murderers such as these!"

A murmur rose among the multitude, swelled louder and louder, till it burst in a yell of rage. Unarmed as they were, the more daring closed in upon the Cretan spearmen.

"He is right!" shouted a Trojan archer, and his comrades raised a shout of affirmation.

The two parties faced each other like surly dogs, the mob lashing itself into fury, the police gripping their sword-hilts and scowling upon the invaders, who remained calmly waiting for their commander to give the next order.

Biting his lips, the young Cretan strode out from beside his companion and confronted Ragnarr.

"It had been well for you, barbarian," he said contemptuously, "if you had never defied the majesty of Crete. Know that I am Ambrogeos, first-born of Minos the Great, who is Son of the Bull and King of Kings. Yield now while you may, and mayhap you shall die by the sword; but strike another blow and you and all your wretched company shall feed the Minotaur!"

Ragnarr looked down upon him, his blue eyes blazing.

"I yield to no pirate," he answered grimly. "Nor do I boast; but as to dying by the sword, we will sacrifice a Cretan calf to Tyr before we board the Ship of Death."

The two gazed at each other long and unflinchingly, till at last the black eyes fell before the sword-like blue. Ambrogeos clenched and unclenched his fingers, his breast swelled with rage, and he turned toward his men, his lips parted for the fatal command that should plunge them all into bloody conflict. But before he could utter the words, his lantern-jawed companion laid a bony hand on the youth's smooth shoulder and whispered in the Cretan tongue:

"My lord, these must be the men whom we seek. Remember, they must be taken alive, that the Minotaur may have a full meal. They will not yield without a fight; but that old craven in the palace yonder may easily be persuaded to hand them over to us without the loss of a single Cretan life. Restrain yourself for the present and soon they shall be ours."

Ambrogeos nodded curtly and turned his back on Ragnarr. In response to a gesture of command, two marines detached themselves from the ranks and ran swiftly back to the ship. The rest closed up, the old admiral barked out a sharp word of command, and the marines swung smartly to the left, and took up their march toward the Scæan Gate.

The mongrel crowd burst into hoots and jeers, with derisive signs and obscene gestures of defiance. The Northmen gazed after the departing Cretans with stern hostility, and Ragnarr, scornfully throwing down the captured sword, turned again to his task.

Acharsis, the captain of archers who had stood by him so well in the street fight with the wild lumbermen, now left his grinning bowmen and stepped up to Ragnarr.

"My lord," he began, "you have won your point and they will not disturb you on the fair-grounds again. But if I do not err, those two fellows who were sent to the galley yonder have carried the command that you be seized and slain if you stir from the sacred precincts. Here you are safe; but embark on the river, as you now seem planning to do, and you are lost."

"Friend," answered Ragnarr, "I have here the sign and seal of your king, giving me safe conduct out of this land, and authority to transact certain business in his name. This is my guaranty, and surely you and all your fellow-soldiers will enforce your monarch's word."

"No, my lord," answered Acharsis sadly, "these pirates respect no king but their own, and I have no orders to plunge my land into a war with Minos."

"Then there is nothing but to remain here till the Cretans please to depart?"

"Nothing, my lord," answered Acharsis. "But I will see that you do not lack food and drink until the king can act."

THE Cretans marched in through the Scæan Gate, the guards, by the orders of the badly frightened Dardanus, permitting the armed strangers to enter unchallenged. The old admiral picked out the stately residence of a Trojan noble, and sent the swaggering little company in charge of a petty officer to commandeer the place for quarters during their stay in Troy. Then he and the Prince Ambrogeos mounted the stately street to the citadel.

Dardanus sat alone in the great throne-room, biting his nails and staring helplessly at the heroic figures of his ancestors painted on the walls. Fear, rage and cunning played over his features in swift succession. It could be no common errand which had brought the son of Minos, unheralded, to Troy.

What if the Cretan suspected his schemes? Oh, if he had but a few hours more! There must be some way, some escape from this unlucky situation. He would do anything, give more tribute, pay homage, no matter what, to allay his enemy's suspicions till his plans could blossom and bear fruit.

Imperiously waving guards and ushers aside, Ambrogeos of Crete entered the broad doorway, followed by his admiral, Rhodonthos. Ignoring the courteous address of welcome which Dardanus had prepared, and now rose to deliver, he strode to the very dais. His face was flushed with passion, and in a voice which anger choked, he demanded of the king:

"What does it mean, thou dog of Minos, that strangers dare insult our sacred person before thy very gates? Is this city so swollen with its pride that its bastard dependents think to raise their heads against the king of kings? What payment dost thou hope to make for an offense as black as this?"

Poor Dardanus cowered in his cushioned throne, his jaw drooped and his wizened face blanched.

"What have I done to deserve this, most gracious prince?" he pleaded. "Tell me who has so offended, and I will smite off his head and have it stuck on a pole."

The prince's utterance was choked and the veins swelled on his temples. Wrath had been boiling in him since Ragnarr had outfaced him before his own men, and his humiliated pride clamored for revenge. Rhodonthos spoke for him, for Ambrogeos was incapable of utterance.

"It is this, King Dardanus. We had just landed and were proceeding peacefully through the fair, when a stout rascal blundered into our path. The Captain Staltes undertook to remove him, and the fellow smote Staltes with his fist, hurting him sorely. We would have laid hands upon him, but his master, whom I heard called Ragnarr, interfered, threatening us with a sword which he had seized from one of our own men. When we resented his deed, he dared to insult the sacred person of our prince and even menaced him with death. We would have dealt with him as he deserved, had not the mob, encouraged by your troops, O king, given him their support. This demands investigation—look you."

The old king's terror was pitiful to see. Oh, if that luckless Northman had only taken himself off before the prince arrived!

Now Dardanus must choose between his schemes, promises and hopes, and the wrath of Minos, which was destruction. Suddenly a thought came to him. If he could disavow the deed of Ragnarr, it might be possible to soothe the Cretan with promises of amends and goodly gifts, and so hold him in the palace discussing terms till the Northmen were gone. Then it would be too late for his plans to be checked, and all might be well in the end, albeit at some cost to his treasury.

"Good Prince Ambrogeos," he said, in wheedling tones, "these wretched fellows are no subjects of mine, but base barbarians from the North, who came hither to trade. You have my word——"

"By the Bull!" shouted Ambrogeos, his eyes gleaming with triumph. "These are the very men I seek! Know, Dardanus, that I have come all the long way from Crete to fetch these fellows to my father, who has heard that they are the forerunners of great fleets from their own land to cheat us of the trade of all the seas. Our spies report that they are dealing in tin, which, as you know, it is forbidden to carry save in Cretan bottoms. King Minos, in his wisdom, has determined to have these barbarians and feed them to the Minotaur! Thus we shall discourage those who seek to rob us. Give them to me, and you shall be purged of the offense they have committed."

Dardanus buried his face in his hands. It was all over, his cherished dream of freedom and empire. He must die as he had lived, the dog of Minos. Resentment stirred in his heart. He would make a last stand for his hopes.

SLIPPING a piece of gold into the guardsman's hand, Rala stole away from the curtained door, her eyes wide with terror. She ran wildly down the corridor, her bare feet falling noiselessly on the pavement. Ragnarr's life was in danger, and she alone could rescue him.

Her thoughts kept pace with her flying feet. As she turned the corner of the great stair, she collided with a white figure which seized her with clinging arms. It was Ilia.

"Let me go!" cried Rala. "Let me go to him! I must save him!"

"Save whom?" asked the princess coolly; then, even as she spoke, her heart turned cold with fear.

"Speak, girl!" she commanded. "What threatens him? Tell me, and it may be that I can help you."

The frightened girl poured forth her story. Knowing what she did of Ragnarr's business with the king, she had suspected some connection between this and the Cretan visitation, and feared for his safety. When she had heard loud voices in the throne-room and recognized the accents of the Cretan court, she had bribed the guard to let her listen at the door and had heard all.

Ilia's face turned pale. "Go to my chamber," she commanded. "Wait there for me. It may be that I can say that which will strengthen my father's heart against this cruel prince. If I fail, I shall send you to the Lord Ragnarr."

So saying, Ilia walked swiftly toward the throne-room. As she drew near the entrance, she heard a voice crying in tones of anger:

"Enough of your temporizing! Deliver me these Northmen, to die the nameless death, or I will come with ships beyond number, blockade your ports, and, when it pleases me, destroy your walls and stamp your city flat. Those whom I take I will slay, and all of noble blood, yourself among them, I will give to the insatiate hunger of the Minotaur!"

CHAPTER VII

THE NIGHT OF TYR

ILIA stood hidden in the shadow of the doorway, watching her father's face. She saw terror written on it, and helpless acquiescence. The sight made her blush with rage and shame: rage at the Cretan's bloodthirsty arrogance, and shame at her father's weakness. Little did she know how powerless he was against the vast naval power of Minos.

She had seen enough. She swept into the room, head held high, eyes blazing with outraged majesty and offended womanhood. Without waiting for them to notice her, she raised her voice in a torrent of indignation.

"You base and evil men!" she cried. "Offspring of a wicked race! What you propose is infamy. If you could enforce your cruel threats, do you dream that Troy would hesitate to choose between shame and destruction? Better to die a thousand deaths than yield up to murderers him with whom we have broken bread! But you can not conquer us. Every man will die, every woman will put on armor and shed the last drop of her blood before we will listen to your vile proposals. The Trojan mother would curse the son who had saved his life by yielding; the maiden would send her lover to unending sleep rather than clasp a living coward in her arms.

"And you, my father, who have called yourself a king! Will you barter your honor and cheapen your royal crown for a few brief years of comfortable life and the hollow sham of a power that others wield? Will you be a puppet and dabble your withered hands in corruption while the Cretan pulls the strings? If I thought so, I would renounce you, spit upon your name, and call my mother harlot, sooner than own you father!

"Oh, does your heart not pulse even now with one drop of that heroic blood which men say ran in your youthful veins, when you destroyed the warlike race that inhabited this land before you, and slew their king in single combat on the plain? Are you that fiery Dardanus who scaled the wall of Abydos before a single soldier reached its base? Are you that king who built these mighty ramparts round our city, defying, as the poets sing, a world in arms to take it from you? If you are he, then hurl these infamous ones into your deepest dungeon and send your defiance thundering about the ears of bloody Minos!"

She stood there like an incarnate goddess in the robes of her majesty, exhorting an erring world to righteousness.

The Cretans had turned at the first ringing word. Ambrogeos stood like one who sees a vision, his handsome face expressing the liveliest admiration. Cleared of the disfiguring mask of wrath, his features, though haughty, appeared delicate, almost effeminate. While Ilia spoke, he never lifted his dark eyes from her.

Dardanus groaned aloud. "Oh, my daughter!" he sighed. "How little you know the strength of fate! I was that Dardanus, that fiery, heroic youth, while the Island Empire chose to let me indulge my splendid dreams. But long before you were born, my child, the young, all-powerful Minos chafed at my soaring ambition and placed upon my neck the weary yoke that now crushes me to the tomb!"

"Then rise, my father, shake off the yoke, and if you can not live heroically, then at least seek a hero's death!"

"Alas, it is too late. The countless galleys of the sea-king would lie in every port and conquer us with the arms of starvation and poverty. Can you not see, child, that there is no hope for the land cut off from the sea?"

Ilia bowed her glorious head, tears of rage and shame in her brave eyes. Yet she was not conquered. She was fighting for love, for honor, for all that makes life worth living; and she threw back her head with the color surging to her cheeks and lips parted to utter further defiance, when in broke the insolent voice of Ambrogeos.

"O Dardanus, your daughter's words have found an echo in my heart. She is a maid of rare spirit, fit for a hero's bride, and her beauty passes the loveliness of the Goddess Ariadne. Her splendor has overcome me, and I relent. Give her to me in marriage and I swear to you by the sacred voice of Dictæ that I will spare these contumacious barbarians, freely forgive their crimes and the guilt of your city, and remit half of the yearly tribute."

The helpless king snatched at this shameful hope, and with a sorry attempt at resumption of his dignity, gave his consent. Ilia fell at her father's feet, her face white with terror, her arms clasping his knees.

"Oh, unsay it!" she begged. "Remember your promise! How can you give me to this man—you who have cherished me all these years?"

She turned and knelt to Ambrogeos. "If there is one spark of tenderness in your breast," she begged, "spare these innocent men; and do not stain your generosity with violence to a helpless girl."

The face of Ambrogeos lit up with unholy joy. "Ah, now I see!" he cried. "You love this tall barbarian, and would have both his life and his love. You yourself have forged the weapon with which I shall pierce his breast. And to you, king of a wretched race, I offer this choice: give me this girl this very night and all will be well. I will even spare the Northman's life. But deny me, and I slay the fellow with all his men, and return to my father with words that shall bring famine, fire and sword about your heads. All shall perish—men, women, maidens, and tender babes, and with them the very name of Troy!"

Ilia rose to her feet, pale, but mistress of herself.

"I will answer for the king," she said in cold, firm tones. "His Majesty consents, not from fear for himself, since he scorns you, but to save his people."

And with head proudly raised, she walked from the room.

RALA fluttered about the chamber of the princess in a fever of impatience. Suddenly the curtains were thrust aside and, eyes staring with horror, Ilia rushed in, fell upon the couch and burst into violent weeping. Rala ran to her, her own heart hammering at her ribs with fear.

"You have failed?" she cried.

"I have succeeded," sobbed Ilia; and as best she could she told the story, her streaming tears choking her utterances.

For a moment cruel joy filled Rala's heart; then the words of Valgard came into her mind: "We are but tools in his hand, child. Can you not be a true tool?" Crushing the rising hope, she said gently:

"Princess, I have dared to love him too; but he has given his heart to you. We have both lost him now; but we have this comfort, that he is safe."

"The gods be praised for that!" murmured Ilia. "But I must give him up—and for what?"

"For what indeed?" thought Rala, as the splendors and cruelties of Crete flashed before her; and with the thought, a sharp suspicion entered her mind.

"Listen, princess!" she cried. "I have lived among these Cretans and know them for a cruel folk who do not value promises over highly. What if Ambrogeos should but postpone his vengeance, and return to seek it after you are his?"

Ilia sat up, gasping. "Do you think he would?" she cried.

"I am sure of it. He does not look or speak like one who leaves a single purpose unfulfilled."

The princess rose to her feet, her hands clenched. "Oh, is no sacrifice enough?" she cried passionately. "Will no tears appease the gods? Must they have blood?"

Forgetful of rank, Rala grasped her mistress by the arm. "I have it," she whispered. "I have a knife here, hidden in the folds of my girdle. I have had it since those wild men attacked me, lest I should need deliverance again, when none were near to help me. I will creep to this Cretan's chamber and stab him as he sleeps."

"And would that keep off the wrath of Minos, silly girl!" exclaimed Ilia. "No, there is a better way. Ragnarr's life is safe for a time, for the prince's word holds good at least till I am his. Do you steal out of the city and hasten to Ragnarr. Tell him all that has happened, and command him, in my name, to flee. Tell him how I loved him, even enough for this, and say that I shall die if misfortune overtakes him. Stay!" she called, as Rala ran to the door. "Come with me, for I know a secret way that will lead you to him swiftly."

Ilia lit a small lamp, took Rala by the hand, all difference forgotten in their common love; and the two stumbled through dark corridors and around drafty corners till they stood in a wing of the palace which was still blocked with the scaffolds and leavings of carpenter and mason, for it was not yet finished. Here, in a certain angle of the wall, they stopped, and Ilia, tugging at a sunken ring, swung open a tall stone panel wide enough to admit a man. She thrust the lamp into Rala's hands.

"I know the way," she said. "My father planned it himself and showed it to me but a fortnight ago. None others know of it. Haste!"

The columned hall rang with the laughter of a merry company, assembled in honor of the royal guest, Ambrogeos, Prince of Crete. King Dardanus, his face almost happy with relief, pledged the noble Cretan again and again. The betrothal was not announced, though the king had pleaded for it, for Ambrogeos intimated that certain matters must be settled first.

Ilia sat at the prince's right, and her eyes sparkled with apparent happiness as she met the admiring gaze of her betrothed. She had never been more beautiful, and Ambrogeos could not look away from her. More than one gay lady nudged the courtier next her, and it was whispered that the princess had made a conquest which might be turned to the advantage of the realm. But ever and again a hunted look crept into Ilia's eyes, and the roses in her cheeks seemed to fade.

When the guests had gone, Ambrogeos turned to his host.

"And now," he said, "let us talk. I have said that I love your daughter, and it is so. But it chances that my father, in his wisdom, desires me to wed the daughter of the Pharaoh Amenothes; and as matters have gone some lengths, you can understand that it would be impolitic to break off the affair. This is why I desire that my marriage with the Princess Ilia be held at once; moreover, it must be secret. And after a few days of happiness, I shall leave this city and return to my father. Then I sail to Crete, to conclude matters there. It is necessary that no word be said of our marriage until I have won the Pharaoh's daughter, lest the proposed Egyptian alliance be broken off, and great harm follow. When all is settled, I shall come back and claim my bride."

"But," Dardanus protested indignantly, "do you propose to make my daughter a concubine?"

"Far from it," answered Ambrogeos in the most friendly manner. "I shall have married her first, and by the custom of my land, she will be my queen. The Egyptian will suppose herself the first, and will not learn of her ill-fortune until she and I are safely married. Then it will be too late; she will be mine and the alliance confirmed. I swear most solemnly that Ilia, whom I love most dearly, shall be my queen."

Dardanus smiled, well satisfied. Polygamy was to him an established fact, and the first wife, as head of the household, was well off. Besides, what an honor to Troy that his daughter should take precedence over a princess of Great Egypt, a Daughter of the Sun!

RALA hurried on as fast as she dared, but had to lessen her pace frequently for fear of putting out the flickering flame of her olive-oil lamp. The passage first wound about in conformance to the architecture of the palace, then ran straight down at a uniform slope through the heart of the hill. Presently it opened out into a wide vault, which, Rala knew from its position, must be the cellar of the Temple of the Mother.

A thought flashed into her mind, and she paused to raise the lamp and examine the low roof above her. Yes, there was the place where one of the ringed stone blocks stood in the temple court, for she could see crevices about its edges, wider than those between the other stones.

The girl hurried on, and now it was not long before she felt the air freshen, and a gust of wind puffed out her light. She felt her way along the wall for a few yards more and emerged on to the plain close by the river-bank.

In sheer surprise, Rala stopped short and gazed up toward the sky. The air was raw, and a thick fog was rolling in from the sea. Moisture is so infrequent in the Troad that the girl, superstitious like all the folk of her time, was filled with awe. Nevertheless, she remembered her errand and strove to get her bearings.

Before her ran the Scamander; from the left came the multitudinous murmurings of the unseen fairgrounds, muffled by the fog. Suddenly a hand touched her shoulder, a familiar voice sounded in her ear, and beside her stood old Valgard.

"You, child!" he whispered. "Nay, no noise. We are too near that painted ship and enemies may hear us. I had crept up on her to get what wisdom I could. This way, and we will soon be with friends."

He guided her back to the grounds and through the dark, fog-wrapped streets, his seaman's instinct steering him infallibly, till at last they came to the familiar spot where the Northmen's tents had been partially reerected.

"Here is a friend, master," he called to Ragnarr, who rose from his wooden stool and came to greet them. "This is Tyr's own night; I have not felt a good fog for weeks and it minds me of home."

Ragnarr took the girl's hands in his and led her to the fire, then wrapped her in a warm woolen mantle. His eyes bespoke anxiety.

"What is it, child?" he asked. "Is your mistress well?"

Rala told her story swiftly, with rapid, eloquent gestures. All the pantomimist's art was hers, and the tale sank deep into the hearts of the hearers.

"So she bids you flee," she concluded. "Get to your ship while ye may, and escape, for her sake, aye—and for mine too."

Her voice failed her, and the tears came.

"Nay, by Tyr and the Gray Sword!" cried Ragnarr, his face terrible with grief and rage. "Men, will ye follow me tonight in a desperate venture that may mean death?"

"Aye, master!" they cried, crowding around him, their rough faces kindled with the exaltation of battle. "We will follow where the Gray Sword leads!"

"But you are unarmed!" protested Rala, panic-stricken.

"Our boats are moored just astern of the Cretan galley," said Ragnarr. "There is one chance in ten that we can reach them unobserved."

"Nay, master," old Valgard interrupted. "I have just returned from the shore where, having crept up through the darkness and the fog, I loosed the boats one after another and drew them an arrow-flight down-stream. In this blackness we can easily reach them undiscovered and go to sea."

"Thou art one in a thousand!" cried Ragnarr warmly. "Lead us to the boats! We will row swiftly down to the *Gray Wolf* and bring her softly up-stream with all our good fellows who have been expecting us these many hours. Above here we will land again; Rala shall lead us through the secret passage she speaks of; and there will be unbidden guests at this princeling's wedding!"

The men would have raised a tremendous shout had not Ragnarr quickly forestalled them, for silence was vital to the success of their enterprise.

The fog had spoiled all the pleasure of the fair. The streets were empty even of patrolling archers; and from close-shut booth and hut came loud grumblings and louder snores, as sixteen mighty figures and one little one filed softly down to the shore, unseen. Rala walked beside Ragnarr, who, as if to manifest his gratitude for her plucky efforts to save him, showed the utmost gentleness in helping her through the filthy unlit alleys, half-blocked with everybody's bales, huge pieces of straw-matting, shards of broken wine-jugs, and an Oriental luxuriance of garbage.

Old Valgard led them to the river-bank, and, after a brief search, he found the spot where he had moored the boats. At his low whistle, the others gathered round and cautiously climbed in, Rala being lifted aboard bodily by Valgard's sturdy arms.

They muffled the oars with strips of cloth and with infinite care to avoid splashing or knocking, they rowed down-stream, each oarsman taking his time from the man before him. The fog was so thick that the Northmen could not even see the lights of the Cretan galley, so they knew that they were quite safe from her for the present. The current made their task much lighter, and it was not long before they floated out of the river-mouth into the little bay.

Here arose a fresh difficulty. They might row directly to their ship, which such experienced seamen had little doubt of finding, even on such a night; but it would be hard to rouse all hands, unship the long oars and start the *Gray Wolf* up-river, without alarming the coast-guard. It was most likely, in this event, that the watchers in the tower would suspect them of hostile designs and alarm the entire city.

It would be wiser, decided Ragnarr, to approach the guard-tower boldly, call for Kamas, and, presenting the letters which Dardanus had given him, demand in the king's name to be allowed to take the *Gray Wolf* up-river to the old city landing above the fair-grounds.

Fortunately for Ragnarr, to whom the courtly Babylonian script that was the regular diplomatic medium of that day, was no more than so many wedges of black on white, the prudent Dardanus, in his desire to avoid any specific action which the Cretans might seize upon, had phrased the letter of introduction in the most all-embracing general terms. At the sight of it, Kamas saluted the king's seal, gave the desired permission, and went back to his supper. Before the Trojan officer had finished his second helping of broiled fish, the *Gray Wolf*, with the small boats hoisted aboard, sweeps muffled and arms served out, was moving silently up the broad Scamander.

Ragnarr himself took the steering-oar, rejoicing in the feel of the fog-damp on the shaft, for he had been off the sea longer than he liked. He steered by memory and the feel of the current, for he could see no further than the mast.

Presently a dim, high shape loomed up off the port bow, and he swung the galley so far to starboard that her bottom scraped thrice on the shoaling sands. Three vague blots of light starred the fog to port, and the sounds of high-pitched, pleading voices reached the Northmens' ears.

Rala, standing at Ragnarr's side, whispered very softly:

"Master, they fear the fog, which is thicker than it has been on these shores for many years. They know it for a sign of the sea-god's anger, and they pray to him that no harm may come of it."

"It is our night," answered Ragnarr.

They rowed on till he knew they had passed the next bend in the river, where the galley would be well hidden from below, even in broad daylight, by the trees of the same grove in which he had told Ilia of his love. Bringing the *Gray Wolf* alongside the bank and ordering the mast to be lowered, Ragnarr quickly disembarked most of his crew and ordered Rala to lead them to the city wall and the entrance to the secret passage.

It was well hidden. A whole precious hour was wasted in the search before they found the opening, cunningly concealed in the cleft between two great stones, which Rala, owing to the darkness and her haste, had failed to notice when she emerged.

Through the narrow opening the Northmen crept, feeling their way along, till Valgard stopped them with an impatient growl. From his pouch he drew a dry piece of softwood, a blunted hardwood drill, a miniature bow, and a handful of wood-dust and shavings. Twirling the drill with the bowstring, he soon had a smoking, glowing mass in the notched center of the softwood piece, and this he blew and fed with shavings till fire burst forth.

Now fat pine torches were kindled, and, as they illumined the way, strange sights met the Northmen's eyes. Scenes of battle, of the chase, and of worship covered the stone walls of the tunnel in continuous fresco. These were fresh-painted, for the passage was new, as was shown by the heaps of glistening stone-dust, chips, and even defective blocks discarded by the builder and not yet cleared away.

Presently the Northmen came to the wide vault which Rala had noticed on the way out; and now she plucked Ragnarr by the sleeve. Halting his men with a gesture, he looked up at the place to which she pointed in the ceiling of the tunnel, not six inches above his own tall head.

First running his finger round the edge of the stone to make sure it was free from mortar, Ragnarr rested the palms of both hands against it and lifted mightily. The stone moved slightly, but settled again. Once more he heaved, rising on the balls of his feet and putting every ounce of strength into the thrust.

The great block rose slowly, hung a moment, then rolled over on its side, leaving an opening wide enough for a broad-shouldered man to crawl through. Lifting himself easily, Ragnarr took a swift glance at what lay above and dropped back, looking well-pleased.

"It is the Temple of the Mother," he said softly. "Follow me, you who left your weapons here."

They made their way to the altar where Ragnarr counted off the stones till he came to the one which he had seen Kamas press. As he handled it, the stone swung inward and there lay their good bronze weapons, gleaming faintly in the dim light of the single lamp that burned before the mighty figure of the goddess.

Swiftly the prince passed the swords and axes one by one to their owners, till at last every man in the company was armed. Then they dropped back into the passage and pressed on, neglecting to replace the great stone.

On they hastened, up steep slopes and around sharp corners, till the tunnel came to a sudden end. Thrusting his massive shoulder against the narrow closure, Ragnarr lunged, his whole body back of the blow, and fell prone as the door flew open. Valgard, leaping out over the prostrate Ragnarr, threw himself at something that lay still on the pavement of the corridor. Then he rose, wiping his fingers.

"Dead already," he announced. "The fool was asleep against the door and fell on his own spear."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SONG OF THE SWORD

THE SIX stone lamps in the palace shrine shone down on a solemn little company. Upon high thrones at opposite ends of the room sat Dardanus and a thin little old man with flowing robes and a long white beard. This dignitary, the High Priest of the Mother, wore about his neck the symbol of his office, the twisted golden chain of intertwining serpents.

Dardanus was clad in his most sumptuous scarlet robes of state and wore a broad gold band about his temples. His right hand held an ivory scepter, tipped with a heavy golden ball.

Midway between the thrones stood a low altar, with crescent horns of consecration attached to each of its four faces and touching at the tips. To the left of the altar and facing the high priest stood Prince Ambrogeos, with the Admiral Rhodonthos by his side. To the right stood Ilia, clad all in white, with a silver diadem upon her head. Beside her was a sad-eyed matron, the Trojan Queen, her face wearing the patient look of one who has suffered much.

All semblance of happiness had vanished from Ilia's eyes. She was face to face with her fate, and she knew not whether her lover had escaped from his triumphant enemy. Her brave spirit kept down any sign of the terror that sickened her soul; she looked upon her fate with unfaltering, queenlike majesty.

The high priest rose, his feeble hands lifted high above his head. At this sign, Dardanus came slowly to his feet, down the three steps of his throne, and delivered to the queen a chain of gold. Then he stood motionless, facing the priest. The queen turned, kissed the chain, and laid it about Ilia's neck; then, taking her daughter by the hand, she led her to the altar.

Ambrogeos and Rhodonthos now bowed their heads before the high priest, turned and stepped to the altar, across whose sacred horns Ambrogeos and Ilia joined hands. Then the high priest began to intone the Chant of the Mother, and as he sang the first stave in his quavering falsetto, two lines of priests marched in through the wide doorway, chanting the Marriage Hymn.

"O Thou, Who all things quickenest,
Who givest life to all that dwell on earth,
Descend from thy thrice holy seat,
To bless and fructify this wedded pair;
Hallow their love and guide their steps,
Through life to life, life-giving, all their days,
Till, lost to earth, from earth released,
In Thee they blend again, in changeless wedlock live."

The song ceased; and swiftly, in strange and wild antiphony, there rose a ringing voice:

"Tyr!
While blade cleaves to handle,
While blood dyes the edges,
While gray sword slayeth,
And gray wolf devoureth,
His fame shall soar upward
As soars the swift eagle,
The ravening war-bird,
Who rendeth his foemen.
Tyr!"

All stood, staring in petrified wonder. Between the ranks of frightened priests a towering figure strode, eyes blazing under the bronze helmet, the right hand clutching a great, naked sword, whose hard gray edges flashed in the lamplight like flickering fire.

It was Ragnarr, and behind him trooped rank on rank of armed and stern-eyed men. Among the first swaggered Hjalti the Bard, whose tongue had been loosed by the singing of the priests. Ragnarr strode to the altar, with eyes only for Ilia, who rushed to him with a glad cry.

Ambrogeos turned pale, but less from fright than fury. He stood for a moment, clutching at the place where his sword-hilt would have been, then, seizing the heavy scepter from the king's hand, he struck at Ragnarr with all his might.

Valgard sprang in, his mighty ax circling round his head; but before he could strike, Ragnarr thrust Ilia into the old warrior's arms, and the gray sword descended to meet the white staff. It cut the tough ivory handle into two pieces, and, turning, struck the Cretan an awful, though a glancing blow, full on the head. Ambrogeos fell, his blood streaming from the wound. The Northmen raised their crashing battle-cry of "Tyr!"

Now were heard the jingling clank of accoutrements and the running of many feet, and through the doorway poured a detachment of the royal guard. The soldiers halted in amazement at the scene, but grim old Rhodonthos cried:

"Warriors, avenge the slaughter of your monarch's guest! Strike these bold murderers down!"

But the soldiers hesitated, for between them and their king stood the stern Northmen, swords and axes raised, while high above the cowering Dardanus towered the mighty Valgard, his ax poised above the king's head.

"Stir and I strike!" he shouted.

Ragnarr stood over the smitten Ambrogeos, his threatening eyes and dripping sword striking terror to the Trojans' hearts.

"O king!" he cried, pointing to the guardsmen. "It is not seemly that all these should hear the words we have to speak together. Is it your will—as it is mine—that all these should go?"

The soldiers stood irresolute, but the king, his tongue loosened by the sight of the cruel ax that hovered longingly above him, bade them withdraw. Priests and soldiery filed slowly out, their faces blank and staring. After them strode the Admiral Rhodonthos, his fierce eyes hot with hatred.

Again Ilia came to Ragnarr's arms.

"You have done what none in Troy was brave enough to do," she said in tones vibrant with triumphant love. "But I fear greatly lest this very deed bring death to you and to all of us that are here. If that befall, then I shall die as I have lived, loving you. Now shall I go also, or is it right for me to hear what you and my father have to say to each other?"

"You shall stay," answered Ragnarr. "Valgard, look to my bride while I have speech with my father here."

Putting up his ax and descending from the dais, the old warrior drew the girl aside, while all stood silent, waiting for the storm to burst.

Dardanus shifted his gaze uneasily under the Northman's piercing eyes. His hands opened and closed nervously, and he swallowed once or twice to ease the dryness of his throat. Suddenly he could endure it no longer. Terrified, conscious of guilt as he was, some spark of his youthful fire came back to him, as the contemptuous glance of the young man roused anger in his heart, and resentment at the violation of his hearth.

"You rash young fool!" he shrilled, stamping his foot. "Was it not enough that your ill-omened presence in my land brought Crete about my ears? Must you now complete my ruin? Think you that Minos will not take vengeance for this murderous deed? Aye, and a bloody vengeance! Well will it be if one of us survive to tell the tale of the sea-king's sacrifice to the ghost of his first-born!"

"Peace!" interrupted Ragnarr. "Is there aught, old trembler, that you fear more than death? I have done no more than my right: I have slain or grievously wounded the man who thought to rob me; I have won my bride with my sword-hand, and have forced her perjured father to treat with me in the open, where lies and broken promises will not avail him.

"I have braved a people in arms with a few men and have declared war on my enemies and yours. As for this lump of flesh—" and he touched the prone Ambrogeos with his foot—"it is no use to raise an outcry over him. If he is not slain outright, it matters not. When the sword Tyrfing sets her teeth in a man, he is doomed. Speak of what counts: what do you propose to do? Stay here and wait for the coming of this Minos, or flee?"

Dardanus trembled with rage.

"Thrice-accursed barbarian!" he screamed. "You bring death upon me and ask if I mean to take it standing or running! Oh, if my frame had the vigor of youth once more, and I were armed! One thing I can do, Wolf of the Waters: the compact between us is no more—I stamp upon it. My daughter shall never be yours in this life, unless you add robbery to murder and tear her from her helpless father's arms. If you dare do that, my curse upon you both! Now go to your ship, hoist your abhorred sail, and lift the ban of the gods from my shores!"

Now Ragnarr's ears caught the tramp of booted feet, and Rhodonthos stood in the doorway, with four armed Cretans behind him.

"Is it the slayer's will that we bear his victim's body hence?" he asked in even tones.

The Northmen raised their shields and drew together, save Ragnarr, who advanced and spoke with grim courtesy.

"Sea-thief, I will not deny the boon a brave man asks. Take your lord, and may we meet again."

"May I live to see that day," replied the Cretan earnestly.

He signed to his men who entered, picked up the prostrate and unmoving Ambrogeos and bore him away on a framework of spears. At the doorway Rhodonthos paused and looked back till his eyes met those of Dardanus.

"Dog of Minos!" he hissed. "We go now, but we shall return to levy such a tribute as will bring wailing into every house in Troy, and spread a royal banquet for the Minotaur!"

Valgard, who stood by Ilia's side, bent over the princess and said softly:

"When we leave this place, we go straight to our ship. The tide will be at the flood in two hours more. If you are bold enough, come through the passage to the grove on the river's bank, by the southwest gate. We will wait for you. He does not know."

"I will come," she answered simply.

Ragnarr looked almost pityingly at the poor old king who had fallen to his knees, his face as yellowy-white as his cloven scepter.

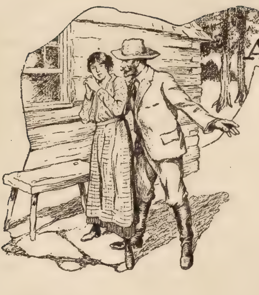
"After all," said the Northman, "it is I who have brought this evil upon you, and none but I should bear what comes of it. What tribute is it the sea-thief speaks of, and what manner of monster is this Minotaur?"

"How should I know?" Dardanus groaned wearily. "They who have seen him have not lived to tell of it. Every year, Crete has wrung from us a tribute of twenty youths and twenty maidens for this Minotaur, and none has ever looked upon their faces again. It is said, and all men believe it, that he is a fearful monster who devours them living. Now Minos will have a life from every household for this deed, and we are fortunate if he asks no more. Oh, that I have lived to see this day!"

Ragnarr raised gray Tyrfing above his head and shook it in his mighty grip.

"By this sword," he swore, "and by Tyr, the god of my house, this is my task, and I take it upon myself! I will sail to this island of Crete, give myself up to meet this Minotaur who fattens on innocent blood, and slay him in single combat! Then, O Dardanus, I will return and claim my bride!"

TO BE CONTINUED



A Woman Keeps A Secret

by Hapsburg Liebe

IT WAS Sunday. The skidders, the log-loaders, the geared locomotives, the ax and the saw of the woodsmen were silent; over the mountains lay the soft blue haze that somehow hallows all the days of September and October.

The midday meal was over, and most of the lumberjacks, clad in their best, lounged here and there on the big, rough boarding-house porches; some of them bullied their friends good-naturedly, others told funny stories; all of them were smoking. Mountaineers they were, nine out of every ten of them, stalwart, sunburned, big-hearted sons of the hills.

Suddenly one of them that was not a mountaineer, a heavily built man under thirty, who never alluded to his past any more than if he had had no past whatever, rose and went upstairs and to his unplastered, unceiled, unpapered room, where even the bedframe was made of rough boards.

He halted just inside. A strapping young fellow in cheap blue serge turned from a small mirror that hung on the opposite wall; he had been giving his thick black hair a careful combing. When he saw his roommate, he reddened a little.

"Hello, Marvin," he drawled in the drawl of the hills—he was a hill man.

Marvin Blair laughed, and sat down heavily on their cheap bed.

"All togged up to go to see old Henry Larrimore's girl!" he said briskly.

"It ain't a criminal offense, is it?" smiled the mountaineer.

"I guess not," laughed Blair. "Fact is, I meant to go to see her myself this afternoon."

Tom Harman looked thoughtful and somewhat perplexed. They had been pretty good friends, he and Marvin Blair; and now—now was a woman coming between them?

"Well," he said finally, "I ain't got no mortgage on her. You've got as good a right to go to see her as me, I reckon. We shore won't fall out over Bess, Marvin. But we oughtn't to both go to see her at the same time. S'pose we pitch heads and tails and see who goes and who don't go?"

Blair nodded.

"Heads you go, tails I go."

The mountaineer took a small coin from his pocket and tossed it almost to the rafters. It fell heads up.

"Lucky boy!" said Marvin Blair, shrugging his shoulders.

Tom Harman stole down by way of the back stairway to avoid a ragging, and hurried off through the woodland. From a window Marvin Blair watched him go with a strange light in his eyes. More than one pair of good friends have been brought to swords' points by a woman.

Old Henry Larrimore lived a mile away in a rambling log cabin at the head of a cove. The guttered path that led from the weather-beaten gate to the front porch was lined with frost-bitten marigolds and pretty-by-nights.

Old Henry sat in a home-made chair in the doorway, and he held an open Bible in his hand. Beside his chair lay a spotted hound with its tongue lolling out.

Tom Harman stopped at the stone step, straightened the collar of his blue chambray shirt, jerked at his tie and uttered a greeting.

Larrimore looked up.

"Hi, Tom. How d'ye come on? Take 'at chair thar on the porch. Fine day. Been to dinner, I reckon? Set down then."

Tom sat down and patted the hound's head. Most dogs made friends easily with Tom Harman, and children liked him; and this is eulogy.

"Whar's Bess at?" he asked awkwardly.

"Bess?" Old Henry bit off a chew of twisted brown tobacco. "I don' know. 'At was shore a fine little rifle ye bought for Bess, Tom; but I'm afeard ye laid out too much money on it. Blast my eyes, Tom Harman, ef she cain't beat me a-shootin' with it! She vows ef ever us and them thar low-down Fallses gits to fightin' ag'in she's a-goin' to he'p! Good stuff in that gyurl, Tom. And it now looks like the'd be more trouble atwixt us and the Fallses. Joe Falls he's been a-carryin' talk around putty sharp.

"Bess hates Joe. By gar! She turns as white as a ghost when she even hears his name spoke. As you know, Tommy, we allus thought it was Joe Falls 'at killed my boy George—pore George! He was the finest boy in the world. Twin brother to Bess, he was—thar's Bess now. Down at the spring in the lorrels. She run, I reckon, when she seed you a-comin'. The mink!"

With a long arm he pointed.

Harman patted the hound's head again, rose, and went down to the spring where he found a slender young woman who was, in all truth, a nymph of the woods—an uneducated, primitive young woman. She was barefooted and bareheaded, and her chestnut-brown hair was caught at the back of her neck with a faded blue ribbon; her eyes were brown too; her mouth was sweet and mischievous, very mischievous. She smiled saucily at Tom Harman.

"Hi, Bess," he greeted her.

"'Lo, Tom," she replied.

They sat down on a moss-covered stone there by the spring, in the shade of a great, cool green hemlock tree. Tom broke off a fern and began to strip the leaves from the stem. He spoke slowly, even for him, when he spoke.

"Bess," he said, "I love ye, and I've come to ax ye to marry me and jine yore forchunes with mine, and be my wife. What's the verdict?"

"Why—I thought you hated all wimmin!" laughed Bess.

Tom frowned hard. His gaze absently followed a bee-martin that was chasing a bee.

"I did say I did," he muttered, " a long time ago. Five year ago, it was. I imagined I was in love with Julie Flint, over on Grandpap Mountain. I wasn't but jest eighteen then, and a fool. I sold my dawg and my banjo to buy her a 'gagement ring —and she went and told it and laughed about it. Told it fust, and 'en laughed about it! A woman jest cain't keep a secret. It's onpossible for a woman to keep a secret!"

He had spoken with a great deal of spirit. It was the spirit of the hill pride, the finest and yet the most unreasoning pride on earth. But Bess misunderstood. If he didn't still love the Grandpap Mountain girl, why was he so worked up?

"Here's a woman 'at can keep a secret, Tom," she said spicily. "I'm a-keepin' a secret now. It's a big secret, too, Tom Harman. It's so big, ef I was to tell you, you—you'd shore jump!"

"Tell me," begged Tom. "I won't never tell; hope to die and go to the devil the next minute ef I do."

"No," said Bess. "I'm a-goin' to show you that a woman can keep a secret."

Tom spent ten precious minutes in pleading. She refused stoutly to tell.

"I bet I know," he muttered. "You're a-goin' to marry Marvin Blair."

"Am I?" she said. "Am I?" she went on. "Why don't you quit loggin' for a livin', Tom, and go to tellin' forchunes?"

"Well," smiled the mountaineer, "you hain't answered my question yit. Will ye marry me, Bess?"

"No," flatly. "No, I won't. Go over to Grandpap Mountain and marry Julie Flint. Good-by, Tom, and luck be with ye when ye go atter Julie!"

She rose and ran from him. He watched her go with fire in his eyes. He loved her madly, as he had never loved the perfidious Julie Flint. Slowly he made his way back to the logging-camp's boarding-house.

THE other lumberjacks were standing in somber little groups here and there on the porches when he arrived. Something out of the ordinary had taken place, he knew. Then Marvin Blair beckoned to him and they went upstairs together.

When they were in their room Blair closed the door and turned to Harman. Blair's face was pale and anxious.

"I didn't mean to tell even you, Tom," began Blair. "But now I think I'd better. They've sent for an officer, and he'll be here any minute. Tom, Joe Falls is downstairs, dead. They brought him in from Mad Dog Creek, a few minutes after you left for Henry Larrimore's. He had been dead for several hours. The gun that killed him was a small-bored rifle. The only small-bored rifle in this whole section is the one you gave Bess. Bess hated Joe like poison because she thought he killed her twin brother. Now do you see where she stands?"

"The devil!" cried the hill man smotheredly. "But she never done it—did she, Marvin?"

Blair looked behind him.

"Yes," he whispered, "she did it. I saw her do it."

Harman's big hands clenched hard.

"See here, Blair," he growled, his voice throbbing, "you ain't a-lyin' about her, are you?"

"Lying about her!" Blair was white. "Tom, I love Bess as much as you do! I was on my way to see her this morning, and just before I reached Mad Dog Creek I saw Joe Falls in the woods ahead of me. Then I heard a rifle-shot and I saw Joe crumple like a wet rag and pitch forward with his face in the leaves. I looked toward the little cloud of powder smoke and there stood Bess Larrimore, with the little rifle you gave her in her hands! I hurried back here to tell you. Then I decided I wouldn't tell anybody. But the size of the bullet will cause her arrest—that and the fact that she hated Joe so much; and when her trial comes off she won't stand for the grilling of the prosecuting attorney, and her very nerve will give her away!"

Through Harman's brain there flashed something Bess had said to him less than an hour before: "I'm keepin' a secret now. It's a big secret, too." So the killing of the man who she believed had killed the brother she had loved more than life, that was her big secret! That poor little hot-headed, fiery-souled child! He regretted that he had given her the rifle.

Blair continued in tones that were low and tense:

"Even if the Larrimores prove that Joe Falls killed the son of Old Henry, it won't clear the girl. And it's up to you and me to save her, Tom, my friend. One of us must make a sacrifice for this girl we both love. Either of us is big enough to do it. We would have a chance of escape, but Bess wouldn't. Don't you see, Tom? Well, are you game?"

"Am I game!" muttered the mountaineer, inclined toward feeling insulted at being asked. "Marvin, my middle name is game. How'll we decide which one of us is to make the sacrifice?"

Blair took a coin from his pocket. It was a copper cent.

"Tails it's you," he whispered, "and heads it's me. Is that all right?"

"Pitch it!" said Tom.

Blair flipped the coin to the rafters; it spun in the air, over and over, and fell with a slight tinkle. The two men bent forward anxiously.

"It's up to me," said Harman, straightening; and he said it without regret, like a man.

They shook hands silently, and then they went downstairs.

II

FIFTEEN minutes later Harman walked into the room where all that was left of Joe Falls lay under an old quilted coverlet. The room was crowded.

Harman forced his way to where a tall and lean, bearded man bent over the silent figure. The lean, bearded man was a deputy sheriff, and he had only that minute arrived.

"Does anybody here know who killed this man?" he asked quietly, his shaggy brows drawn above his alert gray eyes.

"I done it," said Tom Harman, putting out his wrists for the irons.

Now Bill Hines knew Harman, and he

knew that Harman had a reputation as a good, fair fighter.

"It seems to me you was hasty, Tom," slowly. "You could ha' broke Joe Falls over your knee and saved gunpowder. What made you do it, Tom?"

"I reckon I'll carry my little bit o' talk to the trile jedge, Bill," drawled Harman. "Ef you're ready to go, I am."

The deputy ironed the mountaineer, and drew his revolver, not that he thought he might need it for Harman, but because there was danger of the dead man's relatives making a violent demonstration. Hines took the prisoner out to where his horse stood hitched to a little cedar, and mounted. Then, with Harman walking briskly in the road ahead of him he started for a town in the lowlands.

Not for one second had the mountaineer meant to face a trial in the courthouse at Johnsboro; nor did he mean to allow himself to be even locked up in the Johnsboro jail. He was fully determined that he would escape from Hines before they reached the lowlands. But he had a little talking to do before he made his escape, and he proceeded to it.

"Bill," he said over his shoulder, "ef you've threatened to kill me on sight, and I shoot you down the fust time we meet, can I be sent up for that?"

Hines answered—"Not if you can prove that I threatened to kill you on sight."

Harman stopped as suddenly as if he had been struck. He acted well, indeed.

"The devil!" he cried as if greatly chagrined. "Bill Hines, I hain't got no witnesses to prove it by!"

"Looks bad. Let's go on, Tom," said Hines.

He seemed more watchful than before. He kept his hand close to the butt of his revolver now. Bill Hines had an oath to keep, and he meant to keep it. Had the prisoner been his own mother's son it would have made no difference.

But Harman had to escape. He was like the rabbit that climbed a tree. Over and over in his mind he turned this plan and that. He thought of leaping from a cliff the road ran on and hiding himself, all but his nose, in a pool of the creek below; he thought of frightening Hines's horse and making a quick dive into the thick laurels—and half a dozen other things—but none of these methods promised enough.

Hines was accustomed to tricks. Hines himself was a fox. Harman did not fall upon an idea that thoroughly pleased him until they had covered several miles.

How small the things that sometimes decide human destinies! Twice that day already the tide of Tom Harman's life had been turned by the mere tossing of a coin. And still another turn was at hand. This time it was so little a thing as the sight of a gray squirrel that ran along on the ground, whisking its bushy tail and making a noise something like the quacking of a young duck.

It was in the squirrel-shooting season. Had it not been the Seventh Day, the woods would have rung with the echoes of the hunter's rifle. As it was, Harman had heard only one shot; generally speaking, the hillfolk remember the Sabbath.

Suddenly Harman stopped and faced about.

"A word with ye, Bill," he said, and he seemed badly frightened. "Them Fallses will take a shot at me as shore as the devil's bad as soon as we git in them thick hick'ry woods ahead thar. I want to ax ye, Bill, to keep both o' yore eyes wide open for a Falls with a rifle. I hain't in a fix to defend myself now."

Hines seemed impressed.

"I've been thinking of that," he growled.

Another mile they made. They had almost passed through a long stretch of golden-yellow hickories when from the mountainside above and to the right there came the keen thunder of a rifle, and Tom Harman wheeled and crumpled and fell on his face in the dust of the road. He moaned and turned on his back, and Bill Hines saw a red splotch on his blue chambray shirt squarely over his heart.

"I told you—to watch for a Falls—you tin-can officer," he muttered disconnectedly, gasping, writhing.

When a man is shot straight through the heart there is no chance for him to live. Bill Hines swore a loud oath, spurred his horse and rode, his revolver ready in his hand, into the hickories. A moment later he surprised a bare-headed and freckled youth in the act of ramming a round bullet into the barrel of an old muzzle-loader.

"You'll shoot a man I've got arrested, will you!" cried Hines. "Hands up, you—quick!"

The boy smiled good-naturedly.

"You've treed the wrong 'coon, mister," he drawled. "I shot a squirrel. Thar it is."

He pointed to a gray-tail lying on the leaves. Light broke to Bill Hines, the fox. He rode at a breakneck pace back to where he had left Tom Harman for dead. Harman was gone.

"I knowed," said Harman to the friend who, with a hammer and an ax, broke the irons from his wrists late that night, "that the'd shorely be a hunter in them hick'ries, Sunday or no Sunday. So I gethered me a handful o' pokeberries from the side o' the road to make blood, and took the resk. And so now it's me for Kaintucky. So long. Much obliged, and good luck!"

The night and the laurels swallowed him.

THERE were no logging-camps in that section of the Blue Grass State to which Tom Harman went. Under a high-sounding name he hired himself to a wealthy horse-breeder; and the horse-breeder liked him, paid him good money for his work and asked no questions.

For nearly three years he tried to be contented with the idea that he had sacrificed home and friends and his heart's desire in a worthy cause. Then he began to think backward frequently, of Bess and his mother, and the blooming laurels on Black Pine Mountain, and the call came; the longing was too great to be thrown down.

He wore a nicely pointed young black beard now, and he was of the opinion that even his own brother would have difficulty in recognizing him. So he decided that he would just slip back home and see Bess again and his people, and his good friend, Marvin Blair, then slip back to Kentucky without the law's being any the wiser. And perhaps —perhaps he would bring Bess back with him as his wife. He believed she loved him. And if she did love him, could she refuse to marry him after what he had done for her?

Back to Tennessee's dim blue hills went Tom Harman, and he walked the last hundred miles of the journey because he did not like to run the risk of meeting the fox, Bill Hines.

At noon of a day toward the last of July he reached the crest of long, low Black Pine Mountain and sat himself down on a stone to rest. Spread out before him, beautiful in the waxen white of the laurel bloom, was his beloved home country. The old logging-camp was still there, but a great deal of the timber, of course, was gone.

From where he sat he could see neither his father's nor old Henry Larrimore's cabin; so he gave his attention wholly to his old friends, the sputtering locomotive, the thundering skidders, and the long-armed log-loader.

For half an hour he sat there and watched it; then he rose and went rapidly down the mountainside to shake the right hand of Marvin Blair, if he was still there; and Harman hoped he was. Blair, of course, wouldn't tell; and when he had seen his old friend he would go over to see Bess.

He found Blair easily. Blair was giving orders to a pair of cutters—he now held a foreman's place—and that was good. Harman was very glad of that.

Harman stepped out of the blooming laurels and confronted his old partner.

"Marvin, do you know me?" he cried happily.

"Not from a side of sole-leather," said Blair, halting abruptly.

"Tom!" smiled the mountaineer.

"Harman!" exclaimed Blair. "How're you, Tom?"

"Keen as a mink!" They shook hands. "How's Bess Larrimore, Marvin?"

"All right," said Blair. He went on nervously: "Say, Bill Hines has haunted this place almost daily since you got away from him. He feels that his honor will never be made whole until he gets you—you know how he is, Tom. And he'd know you through your beard. He'd know you if you had a bear's face on you! Better sneak over to your father's and hide there, and do it quick. I'll be over tonight to see you, and I'll tell Bess you're here. Be careful! Hines holds out that you will be caught if it takes the rest of his life."

"All right," said Harman, and he dove into the thick laurels.

Almost on a line between him and his father's cabin was the cabin of old Henry Larrimore, and the temptation to stop and see Bess for one little minute became strong. He yielded to it and went creeping up to the spring under the giant hemlock. Bess was nowhere in sight, and he went on to the house. A gray-nosed old hound came to the weather-beaten gate to meet him, and he gave it a friendly pat on the head. Then he hallooed softly.

Bess came to the door. He saw that she

was a full-grown woman now, mature and roundish. She wore her hair up, and she wore shoes and stockings, and skirts of blue percale reached to her ankles. It was evident that she did not know him. Forgetting all about Bill Hines, he acted upon a mischievous impulse and said to her:

"I'm a travelin' fortune-teller, kind lady, and all I charge for a full life readin' is the pitiful sum of ten cents. Your money back if you're not satisfied."

It came smoothly enough. Nearly three years of association with Kentucky horsemen had taken away much of his native dialect.

"Come in and have a chair on the porch," said Bess with a vague unhappiness in her voice. "I'll bring out the money."

Harman went to the porch and sat down. He drew the rim of his broad black hat low over his eyes to prevent her from recognizing him. She came out, gave him a nickel and five pennies and sat down in a chair facing him. He put the money into his pocket and reached for her hand.

"A man who loves you is not far away," he began in a monotone, staring intently at her palm. "He has come back here to ask you to marry him. He couldn't think of anything but you in the daytime, nor dream of anything but you at night, up in Kentucky. He loves you more than life; and if you love him the devil hisself cain't keep you two apart. If you——"

The young woman tore her hand from his and went to her feet. She knew him now, even through his beard.

"Tom!" she cried broken-heartedly, and there was all the grim tragedy and suffering of death in her brown eyes. "Tom! You've come back for me, and I—I've done went and married myself to a man I hate!"

"Married!"

Harman, too, went to his feet. His face was chalky white, and he looked at her with stern and bitter reproach.

"Two months ago," she said. "To Marvin Blair."

III

SHE bent her head, crushed, broken. He stood over her, primitive, strong and terrible. And yet, he tried to reason with himself. She had never promised to be his wife. Still——

"What made you marry him?" he asked, and his voice was pinched down so much that the woman thought he was speaking gently.

"I didn't think I'd ever see you any more," she answered weakly and hopelessly. "My father and mother died after you left. I wanted a home of my own. I decided I'd as well marry Marvin as anybody else, or better, acause he was yore best friend, I understood. But I soon hated him. He's mean to me. He's a brute. Marvin Blair's a brute! To look at him and to hear him talk, you'd think he was a saint. But he ain't. He's oily. Tom, he fooled you; he cain't be no friend to anybody!"

"Yes, I reckon he fooled me," agreed Harman. "But he won't never fool me no more. And he won't never treat you mean no more. I run away the other time to save you, but this time I'll run away to save myself. Bess, I——"

Bess had raised her head. The man before her read surprise, even amazement, in her countenance.

"You say you run away the other time to save *me!*" she cried. "How come it that you run away to save me? Are you crazy, Tom, or am I? I don't know what you mean, Tom! Oh, I wisht you hadn't ha' killed Joe Falls. He ought 'o have been killed, but you——"

"Killed Joe Falls!" cut in the hill man, taking the woman by the shoulders. "Why, you—you was the one that killed Joe Falls. You done it with the little rifle I bought for you!"

"Oh, Tom," almost hysterically, "you know I couldn't kill a man, don't you?"

Light broke to Harman. Suddenly he understood: Marvin Blair himself had killed Joe Falls, in a card game, of course; and afterward Blair had cleverly covered his crime and cleared the way to the prettiest girl in the Black Pine section at one cunning stroke.

It threw Harman into a boiling rage. And he was disappointed, too. Truly, the real friends of a man's lifetime may be counted on one's fingers, for friendship is scarce, and finer, less selfish than any other kind of love. But, after all, Blair had willingly taken his chance on the tossing of a coin. There Tom Harman found himself in a dilemma.

He told Bess all about it. Bess went into the cabin and returned a moment later with a fully loaded automatic pistol of small caliber, which explained much to Harman. That pistol had been used in the killing of Joe Falls, he was sure. He unloaded it and gave it back to Bess.

"Put it where you found it," he said to her. "I'll be back tonight to have a little talk with Marvin," he went on, turning toward the gate, "and you'd better not be here."

"You ain't a-goin' to kill him, Tom!"

"No, I guess not. I'll own up that I'd like to, but I don't want to ruin yore future and mine by doin' it."

His future and hers! She blushed happily.

Tom's people told him they had not seen Bill Hines for months. Plainly Blair had lied. Then Tom and his father laid a plan, and Mark Harman took his long rifle and went to see that Blair did not try to make an escape.

AT SUNDOWN, while Tom sat at the supper-table, Bill Hines walked in with a revolver in his hand.

"I've got you, Tom," he said quietly.

"Yes, I guess you have, Bill," replied Tom; and he ate on as if it were a very commonplace thing to be arrested on a charge of murder. "Have some supper, old hoss?"

"Thanks, not if I know it," Hines winked. "You'll play no more tricks on me, Tom. You won't get away this time!"

"I won't?" laughed Harman, with a broad wedge of huckleberry pie in hands. "How do you know I won't?"

"Wait and see if you do," smilingly. "When you got away from me three years ago you done something to brag about, Tom!"

"I know it. Marvin Blair sent for you, didn't he? Telephoned?"

Hines declined to answer, and by that, Harman knew that he had guessed correctly.

On the mountainside above, a heavily built, anxious man watched the Harman cabin as a hawk watches a squirrel's nest, and back in the blooming laurels and old mountaineer with a long rifle in his hands watched him just as closely. When Bill Hines had taken his prisoner toward the Johnsboro jail, Marvin Blair drew a long breath of relief and started rapidly homeward. And behind him, stalking him as silently as ever he had stalked a bear or a deer, went old Mark Harman.

It was pitchy dark when Blair reached the cabin that he called home. There was no light in the log-house, at which he wondered. He entered, lighted a lamp that was on a small home-made table and called for Bess; there was no answer. Frowning, he took the automatic pistol from its place on the high smoked mantel and dropped it into his pocket; and then he sat down at the little table and began to turn certain matters over in his mind.

Then the front door opened suddenly, and in stepped Tom Harman, and there was no officer with him!

"Hi, Marvin," said Harman with a very good imitation of the camaraderie of the old days, as he dropped into a chair across the table from Bess's husband.

"Hello," muttered Blair worriedly, and his right hand went to the butt of the little blue pistol in his coat-pocket. "Seen Bill Hines?"

"Yes. He arrested me, and I got away from him," with a broad smile; it was a victorious smile too.

"How?"

"Used my brains, like I done before. Also I took his star and his gun from him—see?"

He turned his left coat-lapel and showed a shining deputy-sheriff's badge. Just above the edge of the table he thrust the round nose of a big revolver.

"I'm actin' deputy-sheriff now," he went on, his voice growing harder, "and I am here to arrest you for killin' Joe Falls in a card game!"

All in the space of a second Marvin Blair darted downward, aimed the little blue pistol and pulled the trigger. Harman laughed.

"I'd done unloaded it," he said, "and I watched you when you come in to see that you didn't notice it; and you didn't. Take your chair and let's have a talk for old times' sake. Maybe I'll give you a chance."

White-faced, Blair crept back into his chair. The mountaineer tossed a copper cent to the table.

"Let's pitch a few heads and tails," he suggested. "To show you I'm game and a sport, if you'll throw heads once out o' ten throws I'll leave the country and keep my mouth shut. I'm a man o' my word, Marvin, you know that; but if you don't throw heads once out o' ten throws, you're to write a confession to clear me, and then leave the country yourself, startin' right now. Is it a go?"

"It's a go," weakly and dazedly.

Blair knew that if ever his case went to court he was a doomed man. He picked up the penny and tossed it. It fell tails up. Three more times in succession it fell tails up. It was like a coin enchanted. Blair examined it closely in the yellow light of the oil lamp; then he swore bitterly and threw it disgustedly to the floor.

"What's the matter?" asked Harman quietly. "Is anything wrong with the penny, Marvin? Why, man, it's the very same penny we pitched nearly three years ago to see which one of us went up in the place o' the girl we both loved!"

He went on, in another tone:

"You scoundrel, you cheat, you low-down piker! That penny was made out o' two pennies—it's got tails on both sides! No wonder you was willin' to take your chance on tails! How did I come by it? It was in the ten cents your wife gi' me for tellin' her fortune—I didn't know you was married. Now you write that confession and light out, or else I take you to Johnsboro. Which do you want to do?"

Blair wrote the confession, signed it and gave it to Harman. Then he broke for the front door—and ran straight into the powerful arms of Bill Hines! When Blair had been ironed the young mountaineer gave the empty revolver and the badge back to its owner. Hines, a little distrustful, had kept Tom covered while he was working out his part of that which had just taken place in the cabin.

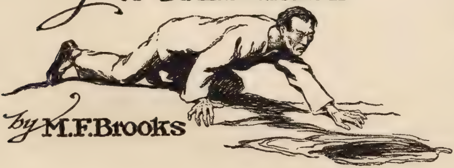
When Bess had her separation, Harman went to see her. Together they walked down to the spring among the laurels, and together they sat down on a stone under the great, cool green hemlock.

"There's one thing I'm dyin' to know, Bess," said Harman, as he slowly stripped the leaves from a fern. "What was that secret you was keepin'—that big, big scret?"

Womanlike, she answered his question with two questions.

"Couldn't you guess, Tom?" blushing. "Do I haf to beat it into yore head with a club, Tom—honey?"

The Manhood of a Chinaman



by M.F.Brooks

WE WAS taking a hike 'cross country. We had laid up at Mojave for a few weeks, "coolin' off, an' gettin' civilized again," as Old Wade put it.

Fact is, we had started for Los Angeles, but there chanced to be a pretty good bunch of good fellows in town when we struck Mojave, and we couldn't resist the temptation to cool off an' get civilized, although the old *Times* thermometer at the station never pointed at less than 120 in the shade, and the civilization consisted mostly of saloons and other joints, with some pretty tough citizens for playmates.

It wasn't the Mojave of today; they have some churches there now, and good schools; most of the dives and some of the saloons have disappeared, and with them has also faded away a heap of that element of miners who used to drop in there for supplies, or to blow their gold-dust at poker, crap, roulette, tiger or women. It was some town in those days; open all around, with the skies for the limit.

And speaking of skies reminds me that Measles says once, when we had punched a burro and hiked it in from Caliente and had stopped to gaze in some wonderment at a new gospel house that had located there—says he:

"God's got His locatin'-stakes out here at last. But it's a blue chip again' a cigarette that He never would of got a claim here if the Southern Pacific hadn't saw it first an' told folks about it."

Measles ain't much along the prophet line, but he sometimes speaks parables.

Well, as I was saying, we was taking a hike 'cross country, Old Wade, Measles and me. A fool prospector had blowed in to Mojave and told us in strict confidence—liquor confidence—of a new strike that had been made down the valley. He mentioned some landmarks, and Old Wade had a full page Rand McNally of it in his nut at once. He ain't a guesser, Wade ain't, on California localities; he knows.

We was heading for Milligan. At least that's how the place is known now, for the same old S. P. has located it too, now. But at that time there wasn't any Southern Pacific, or any Milligan there; it was just desert, and black, burnt-out hills. We was camped for the night in the hills above where the town or town-site of Milligan now is.

I said we was camped for the night, but we wasn't; we was camped for the day, for one does his traveling by night there mostly. You would, too, if you was tenderfoot enough to once try a daytime hike in Death Valley or any of its suburbs. Measles was sweating and roasting a Chinaman who had bested him at a little game of draw in Mojave.

"They ain't no good," says Measles. "They're a dirty, thievin', lyin', cowardly, cheatin' bunch, the whole lot of 'em; an' the next one I sights I'm goin' to smoke him up proper," says he.

"As a bunch," says Old Wade, "you may have 'em sized proper. They sure ain't much on the tidy-up business, but they'll work. And take it from me, Mister Measles, you'll smoke up no Chink while in my company unless you can beat me to it in drawin' a gun."

At them remarks I kind of raised up and took interest in the town topics, for I've noticed that when Old Wade says "Mister" to a man with that peculiar stress placed on the said Mister, there's some feeling in the matter, and the said party addressed as Mister has somehow trod on slippery ground.

Measles got the hunch, too, for he looks at Old Wade kind of sidewise like, as it were, and says:

"Everybody has got his own ideas about Chinks, I guess, same as about anything else. I ain't meanin' no disrespect about any Chinaman friends you may have; but if any one has ever noticed a pigtail that wasn't dirty, an' a thief, an' a coward, I'd like to hear all about him, 'cause I ain't—never."

Old Wade didn't say a word; he just laid back and smoked. After a while, though, he says, as if he was talking to hisself—

"He sure was dirty, an' I reckon he was crooked all right, but he wasn't no coward."

"Was you addressin' me?" says Measles.

But Old Wade didn't answer; he just laid still and smoked. After a while he sits up and looks around, first at the hills, then down into the valley where the heat waves was dancing, and where the glittering reflections hurt the eyes to look at. Then he speaks up; speaks kind of slow and low, as if talking to hisself, and says:

"If I was a painter man an' could paint these hills just as they are; if I could paint them cliffs, burned an' black, with them splashes of blood red, an' them streaks of bright yeller an' green, an' all colors all standin' out in places, bold an' bright against that far hill of dull warm gray that seems to disappear somewheres off there in a sort of haze of all colors an' no colors, banked up by that purple bank of mist or clouds, or whatever it is, where the eye stops; or if I was one of them men that can write words what take hold of you an' grip your throat, an' swell up your heart till you feel an' know that somewhere is God, big enough, an' straight enough, an' knowin' enough to make them hills, an' that valley down there—that burnin', scorchin', killin' valley, down there—that valley with its burnin' sands, its chokin' alkali, its untold riches, its side picters of cool lakes an' streams where there ain't no water; that valley what offers you alkali when you want bread; sand when you want breath; a plumb hell-heat when you want water; death when you want life. Yes," says Old Wade, standing up and holding out his hands, sort as if he was going to offer a blessing same as a preacher man—"yes," says he, "a God brainy enough to make all this—this color, this stillness, this desert, this heat, an' to make it for a purpose that no man yet knows; to make this, the likes of which ain't no place else on earth but in Death Valley. I say," says he, "if I could paint such a picter, er write such a piece, I'd——"

"Well?" says Measles, sort of gulping.

"I'd be able to paint the picter, or write the description of him," says Old Wade.

"Of who?" asks Measles.

"Of a Chinaman," says Old Wade, and he goes over and leans on a boulder, and me and Measles didn't say anything.

Pretty soon he comes back, slowly filling his pipe. "Tell us about him," I asks him; and he points with his pipe-stem out over the valley that here lay glistening and white, as if it was paved with snow or ice.

"Look straight in line with that peak over yonder, about three mile out on the valley. Do you see that house there?"

"I see a big rock there," says Measles.

"'Taint no rock; that's a hut—a house," says Old Wade. "A house built out of salt, rock salt."

"Huh!" says Measles.

"The Chinaman is out there; we buried him just forty steps south of the house. The whole valley there is a bed of rock salt for miles," says Old Wade.

"Did you shoot him up?" asks Measles.

"IT WAS seven year ago now," answers Old Wade. "There had been a silver rush to a new camp over yonder beyond that far range. There's some pretty good stuff in the way of silver over there, only everything is all broke up, an' no tellin' when a lead will pinch out.

"I reckon there was about forty or fifty of us right around there in the near-by hills. There wa'n't no town, only a camp—a few tents an' a shack or two. One gin-palace had broke into the game, though, an' a Chinaman runs a washee house an' does odd jobs, an' plays poker.

"One day, right in Midsummer, when hell didn't have nothin' on it for hot, a party of three struck the town, an' it wasn't long till every man thereabouts had foregathered at the gin-shop to talk about 'em, for there was a woman an' a boy in the outfit. Seems they had come West from Illinoy, or some of them far Eastern states. The man had been a professor in a college or correspondence school, or somethin' like that, where they teach all about minin' to tenderfeet who ain't never saw a mountain. They was here to show us minin' fellers how minin' should be done scientific.

"He was a nice little feller, all right, an' real sociable, when he wasn't studyin' out some problem in zo-ology or dox-ology, or somethin' like that. An' the woman! She was a wonder! Full of ginger and go, an' she'd shake hands with a feller jest as though she was a real man. I don't jest re-collect how it happened or why, but the zo-ology man got mixed up with one of the boys over a claim, an' we buried him neat as circumstances would allow in a little side cañon near by.

"'Course the woman takes on somethin' grievous. She tells us in several kinds of language how we was all murderers, an' thieves, an' cowards. She gives the high an' mighty to all of us 'cept the Chink. She jest naturally adopted that Chinaman an' wouldn't leave him out of her sight. I guess it's right, all right, that the woman human gets a hunch from somewhere as to who's straight goods an' who ain't. There ain't no argufyin' or reasonin' about it—she jest knows. Anyhow, she thinks she does, so that settles it with any proper man.

"Well, she hustles Sam Ling—that's the Chink—'roun' that camp till he gathers together a outfit, an' they makes ready to make their getaway for Los Angeles. The Chink strikes me for four bits I owes him for wash, an' says: 'We stlike um tlail to Los Langelis, plitty quick.' I argues with the cuss, an' told him it was sure death for them to tackle a trip through the valley in Summer. But the simp only says: 'She say we make um plenty allee light!' That settles it with Sam; whatever she says goes with him.

"I asks him if any of 'em knows the trail, an' he says: 'She catch um short way—over there,' pointin' southwest. 'She plenty savey,' says he. It sure was the short way all right, but the devil hisself couldn't of lived an' made his getaway by that route over the desert at that time of year.

"So I goes to her an' I says: 'Madam—' the professor used to call her 'the madam' —I says: 'Madam, we-all feels mighty cut up an' sorry for you-all, an' we will some of us go with you if you are boun' to go. You might jest as well take nothin' with you as that fool Chinaman. Besides, you can't get by with it goin' by the route you-all aims to go. There ain't no water that way, an' hell ain't a patchin' to what you'll find down in the valley this time of year.'

"She jest kinder sized me up, all up an' down like, an' turns up the end of her nose, an' says somethin' as how as she pre-fers the company of a Chink gent an' burros to the likes of us. An' the Chink grins, an' says: 'She plenty good savey.' So all I could do was to re-tire; but I found a chance to hit the Chink a kick jest where the back end of his shirtee stops as I went out.

"Well, they started; an' they didn't have water enough in their outfit to last the burro two days, not countin' themselves. It was clean, plumb murder, that's all.

"I roun's up some of the boys an' we had a confab. We hustled together a outfit an' loaded down two burros, mostly with water, an' two of us strikes out through the hills, aimin' to come out about where we decided they would be when their water played out.

"We stopped about five mile below here an' watched for them a couple of days, scoutin' in different directions. Along about five o'clock my partner shows up an' says he had heard shots somewheres down in the valley to the north of us. We struck the valley an' follows the foothills a mile or so, an' then decided to make for the salt shack out there.

"We had gone somethin' like a mile when we foun' the woman, lyin' plumb in our track. She wasn't dead, but, my, she was some sight! Burned an' blistered, with her tongue swollen an' stickin' out of her mouth. She wasn't dead, as I says, but I thought then she would of been a whole lot better off if she was.

"We picks her up; she only moaned, an' opened an' shut her hands, wigglin' an' twistin' her fingers kind 'er stiff-like. Between us we carried her about two mile to the salt shack. We found the Chink lyin' outside the shack near a seep-hole in the rock salt. He had sure crawled there, lookin' fer water. He found some, but it was fifty times saltier than sea water. He was plumb dead.

"We takes the woman into the house an' works over her till next day, when she comes to enough to moan, an' cry fer water. God! I don't never want to put in such a night an' day as them was.

"We buried the Chink, an' that evenin' pard went to camp an' brings one of the burros an' we contrives that night to get her to our camp. She was plumb nutty fer a week, an' then what she tells us changes my mind a heap concernin' Chinks.

"The first night out their burro got to thinkin' as how the hills looks good to him, an' he makes his getaway, carryin' a keg of water with him, that they, bein' tenderfeet, had left cinched on to him. Chink tells them to stay there, an' he strikes out after the beast next mornin', without water.

"He didn't find the brute, but managed to get back to the woman an' kid about noon. He was all in, I reckon, from what she says, but he never complains. He jest smiles his Chinaman smile an' says, 'Be plenty allee light, plitty quick.' They doped him with water, an' that night they starts on again, Chink actin' as burro an' carryin' most of the stuff.

"That night an' next day they must of seen plenty of the hell stored up in Death Valley. The Chink wouldn't hardly touch no water, fer he sees it was runnin' low, but he keeps dealin' out small lots to the others. That afternoon the boy went crazy—plumb heat nutty—an' broke away, an' runs fer a lake he thought he seen. Chink runs him down, 'er jest naturally picks him up from where he had dropped an' carries him back. 'Him be allee light plitty quick; me cally him,' Chink smiles an' says to the mother.

"An' all that day he did carry him. Staggerin', stumblin', fallin', he always comes up with a smile an' a hopeful word, such as, 'We catch um Los Langelis, allee light.' But the boy died that night; died fightin' his mother an' the Chink an' moanin' fer water, fer by this time all their water was gone. Chink's yaller skin was cracked; his lips an' mouth was swelled, an' he staggers like a plain drunk when he tries to walk. And still he smiles.

"They buries the boy about four mile up the valley; up there in the sand, jest aroun' that butte you see stickin' out over there. An' then the woman kerflumixed—went down in a heap. She makes signs to Chink, tellin' as how she can' talk no more on account of her heat-swelled throat, an' can't hike no further. And Chink slings the empty water-bag over his shoulder again, lifts the woman an' staggers on, an' on.

God! what a livin' hell he was endurin'!

"He sees the salt shack there an' tries to holler, thinkin' some one lives there; but he couldn't make no noise with his mouth on account of his throat bein' baked, an' his mouth all swelled out of kilter. But he manages to mumble, 'We catch um housee—catch um dlinkee plitty quick, lillee lady.' An' he staggers on an' on, carryin' the little lady. Fallin', draggin' her. God! How he must of struggled for breath an' fought for each step!

"The little lady tells me as how the Chink falls with her at the door; how they both lays there for hours, till finally she drug herself into the shack. Nobody there; a few rusty tins; a busted sheet-iron stove. But the shade brung her to some, an' she crawls out an' drags the Chink into the shade. All he could do was to smile in a kind of leerin' way, for his face was plumb out of shape.

"She fans him with her hat an' squeezes a few drops of water, hot as fire, out of the water-bag. That night he gingers up enough to mumble a few words, an' you know how every word was like a knife-jab to his blistered throat. In the mornin' he gasps to her, with his Chinaman smile: 'Plitty quick—lillee lady—be allee light. Go—to—hills. Shootee gun; man—catchee noisee. You—allee—light.'

" 'But you?' asks the woman. 'You will die here!'

" 'No kin,' says the Chink. 'Me—catchee—lest—plenty—well—plitty quick.'

"An' she left him. An' she stumbles on through the blisterin' heat, an' over the rough blocks of rock salt, shootin' her gun every now an' then. An' then, says she, that's all she knows.

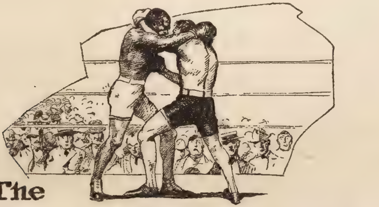
"We patches her up an' finally lands her in Los Angeles, an' she beat it back East, *pronto*. The last words she says to me at the depot was:

" 'Some time get my boy an' the Chinaman an' send 'em to me.'

"I ain't never done it yet; but some time when I make a strike, I will," says Old Wade. An' Measles stan's up an' blows his nose powerful hard an' says, pointin' over to the salt shack:

"I takes off my hat to you, Mister Chink; an' tomorrow I'm goin' over to where you are planted an' appologize fer bein' a heathen myself."

And I made up my mind that I sure would go with him. For whether he was a Chink or a Mex, he was some real man, and God don't let so many of them loose as He might.



The White Hope's Understudy

by Brevard Mays Connor

THIS is not a Sunday-school story. Certainly it is not in theme, and quite unconsciously, if at all, in treatment. To those ubiquitous kill-joys who, Diogenes-like, go, lantern in hand, through the dark passages of fiction seeking, not an honest man, but a red-nosed, sniffling moral, I say here and now, and, senator-like, without fear of contradiction, that there is no moral.

A moral hints of superhuman wire-pulling and miracles and things like that, but there is no miracle here but the miracle of youth, and all the wire-pulling that was done fell to the sunken hands of Doc Saunders, who was far from superhuman—poor man!

DENNY'S excitement was positive agony. It mounted him in recurring waves, starting from his toes and ending by leaping at his throat and choking him. It created a horrible aching vacuum in the pit of his stomach, and folded itself round and round his heart like a thick blanket. Now and then it was akin to nausea.

It was dark in the little rough-boarded room beneath the stands. The one window looked out on a forest of piling, through which one caught a glimpse of a white street running between low, square houses of cream and coral and pale yellow adobe.

Over the roofs of these houses Denny could see the mountains shrugging their shoulders against the blue. His mountains! An acute longing for them went through him like a pain. They were so peaceful and silent and remote, and here everything was blatant with sound and terrifying with the overwhelming nearness of the many. Overhead, twenty thousand feet tramped and stamped and shuffled; ten thousand voices mingled with hysterical effect. And always new feet were joining them, fresh voices adding their mite to the uproar.

It was quiet enough in the dark little room. There was a lull in the coming and going of excited, clamorous men. "Skipper" Burns had taken his lieutenants and his perspiration and his studs into final conference with the champion's manager, his lieutenants and his studs. Doc Saunders had barred the door to the curious, and only he and Denny and the rubbers remained with Gene Williamson, the challenger.

The latter lay naked on a sheet-covered board, a herculean man, as tall and thick and rugged as an oak. His body was strangely white. In the dim light it glowed corpse-like. The rubbers hunched over him, their hands making soft, patting sounds.

Denny did not look at Gene, but at Saunders, who faced the window and the light, which fell upon his face and revealed with cruel distinctness the ravages of a dread disease. His eyes were very bright, but covered with a strange glassy film. They were blue eyes, so dark a blue they often seemed black, and their gaze was disconcertingly level.

No one endured that gaze for very long, perhaps for fear of revealing to him their understanding and their pity. One felt instinctively that his was too proud a spirit to bear pity.

Where he had come from no one knew and no one cared to ask, least of all Denny Boone, for all that Saunders was so kind to him. He had drifted into the training camp one day and become a fixture, quite naturally, without meeting with protest or offering explanation. It had come out somehow or other that he was a doctor who had given up his practise.

Skipper Burns welcomed his medical knowledge and his worldly knowledge as well. He seemed to have as extensive an acquaintance with ring history as did Skipper, and his ideas on diet and training were authoritative.

He it had been who advised retaining Denny Boone as a sparring partner for the challenger. The boy had ridden in from the mines back in the mountains and timidly offered his services. Skipper Burns told him kindly but firmly to go to ——. Burns was a kindly man, but he had been pestered almost out of his existence by aspiring amateurs.

But the doctor had taken the boy by the arm, and, staring all the while into his eyes, had run his fingers up and down the other's sleeve from the wrist to the shoulder. Denny had stiffened under his touch. There was something potentially galvanic in those thin fingers. And he had met the doctor's scrutiny without winking. His conscience was like his blue eyes, unclouded.

"Strip!" Saunders had commanded in his thin, husky voice.

Burns raised impatient yet respectful protest.

"Aw, Doc, whatta you ringin' in a kid like that for at this stage of the game? Besides he ain't more than a middleweight."

Again those fingers swept up and down the boy's arm.

"A shade under two hundred, Skipper."

When they stripped Denny and put him on the scales the beam balanced at one hundred and ninety-eight.

He had only been in the ring with Williamson the fraction of a moment when Burns dashed in between them.

"Say!" he accused Denny. "I thought you said you hadn't fought before?"

"I've not really fought, sir," blushed the boy; "just with the men around the mine."

"G'wan! What do you take me for? You never learned no guard like that around a mine. Who's been teachin' you?"

"Jeff Moloney, sir. He's foreman of our shift."

"Moloney? Old Jeff Moloney, the welter? Why in the blue-blazes didn't you say so?"

Burns turned to the doctor in great excitement.

"Didja see how he covers up and fights from under, Doc? It's the nigger's style down to the ground. He's just what we want to practise this wild-hittin' Irishman of mine on. Go in, boy, and let him try to hit you. Take it easy. Under, Gene, under, I tell you! Cut out that swingin' like a gate and come from under. You can't hurt the top of his head. Under!"

The pudgy manager was all perspiration and delight when he sent the men to the showers. His charge was encountering just that defense he would meet with in the great battle.

"The kid's a jewel," he crowed. "Didja see him, Doc? He covers up like an angel, and he's got a kick in each paw."

"He has more than that, Skipper," smiled Saunders enigmatically. "He has the greatest asset of all—a clean heart!"

Burns looked depressed. The Doc was always shooting something over that he couldn't wise to.

As far as Denny was concerned Saunders was all enigma. He felt drawn to him and yet repelled. He respected him and he feared him, frail and wasted as he was. There was something uncanny in that frail body, teetering on the grave's edge, something awe-inspiring in those too bright eyes that seemed to pierce through the mortal curtains to the Great Hinterland. And yet his presence was a tonic to the boy; his touch, somehow, made him feel strong.

The importance of conditioning Williamson had dwarfed all other considerations in the camp, and Denny's needs, scant as they were, would have been neglected had it not been for Saunders. He rubbed the boy down with his own hands after the sparring matches. He seemed to experience a holy joy in handling that splendid young body, but a bitterness showed through the joy which made Denny very uncomfortable. It was impossible to pity him.

He was deserving of pity, the boy decided, as he watched him now. His skin was waxy-pale, and his scanty sorrel beard could not hide the blue hollows in his cheeks. One did not have to hear the hacking cough issue from his flat chest to know.

Suddenly he turned his head and met the boy's eyes. Denny looked down quickly, but not quickly enough, he feared, to prevent the other reading his thought.

"Denny," came from Saunders as suddenly as that glance had come, "do you remember your mother?"

Denny looked up, wide-eyed and startled by this question, so irrelevant to the time and the place.

"No, sir," he managed to say. "She died when I was a baby."

"She was a Norwegian," the man went on, his eyes strangely dreamy; "a great splendid figure of a woman, true daughter of the North and the Vikings. Your father was Scotch-Irish. You see I have been looking you up! He stood six feet two in his stocking feet. Ah, Denny, Denny, lad, what a wonderful heritage!"

"My father and mother were cousins," he went on after a pause.

The boy stirred uncomfortably. Once Saunders had looked at him his excitement had been wiped out as completely as a wet sponge wipes out the figures on a slate; but he rather preferred that excitement, painful as it had been, to this.

"You're twenty years old," the other mused aloud. "You've never smoked?"

"No, sir."

"Never touched liquor?"

"No, sir."

"Never—but I can see that. Ah, Denny, lad!"

The silence that ensued was really depressing. Denny stared out at his mountains, and wished fervently that he were among them, wished that he were anywhere but here, wrapped about by the embarrassing silence.

AND then that silence was snapped as a thin cord is.

"Doc!"

It was Williamson.

"Doc!"

There was no mistaking significance in that throaty cry. Saunders glided over like a cat and brushed the rubbers aside and back. The order came casually enough, but with a crisp undertone that had a disturbingly electric quality:

"Bring me the ice-bucket, Denny."

The boy obeyed, and the little action left him breathless. He was vaguely aware that the rubbers stood beside him, tense as statues. He was tense himself, with horror.

In spite of the dim light he saw that Williamson's lips were blue and the rest of his face dead-white, like the belly of a fish. His eyes were rolled far back, so that only a small arc of the iris showed beneath the upper lids. Even as the boy looked, a gray froth bubbled from one corner of the challenger's mouth.

With movements surprisingly deliberate, Saunders lifted the bucket with its tinkling contents and dashed a portion over Williamson's face, then his hairy chest, then his stomach. The outer wall of the latter winced inward from the icy contact, his diaphragm jerked up into his chest, and he drew in a long, sibilant breath.

"Doc!" he moaned, exhaling.

Denny's tenseness melted. Every muscle collapsed into flaccidity, every nerve began to tingle until he was shivering wretchedly from head to foot. He was stark afraid.

"A towel!" commanded Saunders.

Neither Denny nor the rubbers stirred. They were not able. Saunders whirled impatiently, flashed a look at the boy and smiled. Under the lash of that look Denny had hurried for the towel. The doctor dipped it in what was left of the ice-water and bound it about Williamson's head, covering his eyes.

"What's the matter?"

They had not heard the door open, and the cry, shrill with premonition, made them turn. There stood Burns, his face blotchy, his paunch quivering, his big studs winking and blinking malevolently in the light from the little window. Behind him stood other men: the governor of a neighboring state, who was to make the presentation speeches, the promoter of the fight, pink and perspiring, Ike Richards, manager for Jake Jenkins, the negro champion. The door was filled with curious faces, all strained with the same unreasoning dismay.

"His heart," explained Saunders briefly. "I was afraid of it. Overstrain. He can't fight."

"O Gawd!" moaned Burns and went limp. He made no move toward Williamson. It was curious that neither he nor any of those with him thought to question Saunders's decision. For a moment there was a stunned silence and then, like a far-off wind ever growing nearer, a whisper spread and grew. It was stilled abruptly by a rasping command from the doctor.

"Don't let any one get upstairs with this. We mustn't let them know—yet."

"What can be done? What can be done?" palpitated the governor.

"O Gawd!"

"There must be a fight!" This from the promoter, with tears in his eyes. "There are fifteen thousand out there. And all those Mex soldiers. There'll be a riot."

"——!" cut in Richards roughly. "There'll be war."

"Find a substitute."

They all looked at Saunders with quick relief.

"Cal Motter is out there——"

"And Dreadnought Green!"

"Hog-fat the both of them," groaned the promoter. "It would be a joke."

"It's a bum joke, any way you look at it," said Richards. "Who is around that is in training?"

Following the question they were silent, staring at Saunders. Without effort on his part he had taken command. All instinctively looked to him for the answer.

There was a little ghost of a smile on his lips that was reassuring. Slowly he turned and looked at Denny Boone; and all eyes followed his. Then he looked back.

"Let's go outside, gentlemen, and talk this over," he said quietly.

They filed slowly out with little curious glances over their shoulders. The rubbers went with them. They seemed eager to get away from that white, hoarsely breathing man on the sheet-covered board. The doctor went last of all, closing the door behind him. Denny was left alone with the broken challenger.

His first act was to move over into the far corner from Gene Williamson, and slump weakly on a bench. Reason told him that the latter could be in no danger. The doctor would not have left him so callously, had he been. Nevertheless, Denny could not conquer an inward shrinking. The whole ironic situation was too truly horrible. He could scarce believe Fate able to play such a prank upon that huge, massive frame glooming almost ghastly in the half-light. It looked too competent, too self-sufficient, too perfect a creation of flesh to harbor a flaw. The thing was incredible.

He was glad when two Red Cross assistants came in and bore Williamson away. He hoped the big fellow was unconscious. He was such a wholesome, good-natured fellow, and he had worked so hard and so hopefully, for this!

Denny sucked in his breath sharply and hurried to the window where he could look out at the mountains, his mountains. Why had he ever left them? He did not like this cruel game. He had only come because Moloney had insisted. There was something he could teach the challenger, the old welter had said. But of what avail was that teaching now? Williamson was out of it. Somebody had to take his place.

He shivered. He remembered how Saunders had turned and looked at him—how they all had looked at him. He remembered those curious backward glances. They had looked first at him and then at Gene Williamson. There was something movingly significant in their fastening upon him the priority of interest. Of a sudden the feet and the warring voices overhead took on a new sound, one that concerned him intimately. His eyes clung to the mountains in a desperate effort to absorb from them a portion of their serenity and strength.

A hand fell upon his shoulder. He stiffened, as he always did when Saunders touched him. Slowly he turned and met those blue eyes, a blue so deep it was almost black.

Saunders was smiling faintly. Both the smile and his eyes conveyed a meaning Denny strove desperately to avoid.

"How—how is Gene?" he faltered.

"Oh, Gene? He'll be all right with a little rest. But the fight must come off, Denny. We've found a substitute."

"Who?" The boy's lips hardly formed the word.

Saunders's answer was even more inaudible. It was not even spoken. His fingers tightened on Denny's shoulder; and Denny knew.

It was a comforting touch, that Denny's thoughts, emotions, even muscles, which a moment before had been asserting themselves independently, suddenly became centralized and obedient to his will. He could think of but one objection.

"But Gene's trunks won't fit me, sir."

Saunders's face became radiant.

"I knew it! Not a blemish! Ah, Denny, lad!"

Denny hadn't the least idea what he was talking about. He suffered himself to be led to a chair and stripped. He became aware then that Burns was also in the room.

"Do your best for me, kid," pleaded the stout manager pathetically. "I've treated you square, now, haven't I? Don't let 'em show me up too bad. It's awful, awful! Who'd ever have thought Gene would go back on me this way?"

His grief was so profound one did not dare hint the selfishness of it.

"Three years I trained him for this, three long years. It's awful! It wouldn't be so bad if I had spent some time with you, Denny, but I couldn't spare a minute from Gene. And now you're goin' into the big fight and I haven't shown you nothing."

Saunders bristled a little.

"He has something more than you could ever show him, Skipper!"

"Huh!" grunted the other jealously. "What's that?"

"Have you ever heard of Galahad?"

"Naw! And I've heard of all the fancy. Was he a heavy?"

Saunders smiled and paraphrased:

> His strength was as the strength of ten,
> Because his heart was pure. . . .

"Huh! One of them book champs," growled Burns.

"And a good one, Skipper. He whipped all comers in his time."

"Yeah, but that wasn't in Jake Jenkins's time." The pudgy manager coughed as he recalled his duty. "But you ain't afraid of a nigger, are you, Denny? And Jake's just half trained."

"On the contrary," frowned the doctor, "he's trained down fine, a perfect fighting machine—in so far as it is possible for him to be perfect. Skipper, would you mind running out and seeing if they are ready for us yet?"

It was a flagrant dismissal, but Burns took it with good grace. He was too crushed to care or feel. Saunders closed the door after him and returned and sat down by Denny, who was dressed now for the ring.

"Lad," he said—and there was a singing undertone of tenderness in his voice—

"you've never done a bad deed, you've never had a mean thought. Your body proves it, your eyes show it, and for that reason you are the only man today fitted to whip Jake Jenkins.

"Let me tell you something: Whenever a man does wrong or thinks wrong a little hollow place opens up inside him. The more he does and thinks wrong the more that place widens and widens."

He struck the boy a sudden sharp blow.

"You're solid, Dennis Boone. Do you understand?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

That radiance flashed into Saunders's gaunt face again.

"Good for you, Denny, lad. If you had understood, there would be a little hollow place opening in you now. Here is something you can understand:

"You and Jenkins fight alike. It is curious how much alike it is. But I suppose it comes from Moloney. He handled Jenkins when the black was first breaking in. Both of you cover up alike. Your head-guard is well-nigh perfect. The result is that this fight is going to be a body fight. You understand? Give him your body, Denny, as long as you can get to his. Trade with him, and you'll come out ahead. He may hit harder, but he'll have something harder to hit, for—and remember nothing but this from now on—*Jenkins is hollow!* Say it over and over to yourself, Denny, lad: 'Jenkins is hollow!' For he is hollow, and you've got to cave him in!"

His pause was more emphatic than his words even.

"I don't have to tell you to keep your chin out of his way. And—say it, Denny! Jenkins is hollow!"

"Jenkins is hollow!" echoed the boy obediently. "And I've got to cave him in!"

Saunders dropped a thin hand upon his forearm and squeezed.

"All ready," sang out Skipper Burns, as he entered with a cloud of assistants at his heels.

In a moment Denny was surrounded, meeting awe and wonder and respect in eyes that had hardly heeded him hitherto.

"You're not nervous, kid?"

"Stuff!" barked Saunders.

He threw a bathrobe over Denny's shoulders, and linking arms, led him off.

Denny was not nervous. He wondered vaguely why he was not, and then decided that it was Saunders's arm pressing against his that rendered him so very cool. It was not the pressure so much as what that pressure conveyed; what he read in those almost black eyes. He knew he would not be afraid, having those eyes upon him. Jenkins was hollow, was hollow! And he had to cave him in—for Saunders's sake!

"We want you on hand to stop the trouble if there is any, lad," said Saunders, as they moved down an aisle under the stands. "We're going to push you right out there in the middle, where they can all see you. And if anybody is disappointed after seeing you with nothing on but trunks and shoes, why—why, I'll give them their money back out of my own pocket."

THEY climbed up a short flight of stairs and emerged through a narrow opening into the blazing sunlight. Everything was so acutely clear it pained the eyes. Denny had visited the stands that morning when they were empty, and had some difficulty in persuading himself that this was the same place.

They had come from under the ring which was elevated some few feet above the main floor. It stood in the center of a considerable level space given over to the ring-side seats. Behind and above these were the railed-in boxes, and behind and above the boxes, again, were other seats, rising tier on tier.

It seemed to Denny that he was walled in by nothing but faces and eyes; but he did not shrink. Saunders's arm was still locked with his.

The governor of the neighboring state was speaking, but with little effect. Those in the higher seats could not hear, and were making the fact known so loudly that they were almost imposing the same conditions on all. Only those in the ring-side can be said to have heard that Gene Williamson could not fight, and that his place would be taken by——

A perfect yell of anger and protest drowned the governor out, over which the metallic chatter of the released telegraph-instruments rose supreme.

"Now, lad," hissed Saunders.

He flicked the robe from Denny's shoulders and shoved him through the ropes, where the governor took his hand and led him to the center of the ring.

He had a proud, regal carriage, this

mine boy, Dennis Boone. He had a proud lift to his blond head, and a serenity of countenance that was a beautiful thing to see. Very straight he stood in his fine young strength, with the sunlight sparkling on his naked torso, and his unwavering eyes meeting the eyes of the multitude. Something of a Viking he looked, and something of a young pagan god.

The yells from the ring-side subsided into a sullen mutter, and then into a shamed silence. Then, like the first gentle drops of a Summer rain, came a light clapping of hands—a woman's hands surely! Other hands assisted. The shower became an approving downpour. The gallery cheered blithely, ignorant for the most part that this was not the advertised challenger. A group of native soldiery on one of the topmost rows, overcome by enthusiasm, or perhaps mescal, capped the climax with a fusillade of revolver shots directed skyward. Feminine shrieks were drowned in a wave of masculine laughter. Handkerchiefs and broad-brimmed sombreros were flaunted; good-humor reigned again.

Little Doc Saunders, in his seat in Denny's corner, smiled and rubbed his hands.

The demonstration had scarcely begun to abate when it spurted into new and greater activity. It mounted wave on wave to the point of hysteria. The champion had arrived!

All one gold-toothed smile, Jenkins, attired in a vivid green dressing-gown, leaped nimbly through the ropes, and stood grinning and bowing to the applause like a plant in a gale. The management, with much wisdom, had decided to dispense with the usual oratory and introductions, and to stage the fight before any malcontents could incite a disturbance. So long as they could feast on battle the crowd would be content. What furrowed deep valleys in the promoter's pink brow was: Would that feast continue long enough to whet the appetite of the blood-lustful?

"How long *do* you think the kid will last?" he screeched to be heard above the uproar; but he only got a mournful shake of the head from Burns, and from Saunders an enigmatic smile.

Jenkins had ceased bowing, although the storm of sound was scarcely diminished. He flung aside his dressing-gown and began to limber up his muscles, stretching, dancing daintily on his toes. shadow-boxing, all with the same pleased self-consciousness that animates the strutting peacock.

Denny, from his corner where the seconds were kneading his limbs and binding his hands with tape, watched the big black. He did not look at the tremendous body or the knotted muscles flowing up and down beneath the coppery skin; he looked at Jenkins's face.

The negro was all smiles, good-nature, but behind the smile the boy sensed something that roused a slowly mounting animosity. It was not anger, rather a cold scorn. In Jenkins's thick lips, in his low forehead, the slanting skull, the wide, brutal nostrils, was revealed a capacity for evil, and more, a familiarity with evil, and more yet, a compliance toward evil that jarred on the virgin instincts of Denny Boone. The very sight of Jenkins made him bristle as a dog will bristle when it comes upon a brute scent.

"He's hollow—hollow!" ran his thought, grimly, joyfully. "I must cave him in!"

He felt no shadow of repugnance against punishing this, his fellow creature. He hated him. He did not hate him because his skin was black, but because that was the color of Jenkins's soul.

The world-famous referee entered the ring and beckoned the two fighters to him. Briefly he introduced them, and gave his instructions.

"Howdy," grinned Jenkins, thrusting out a big black paw. "Howdy, li'l massa. I hopes you ain't goin' to hold it agin ol' Jake if he hu'ts you a bit. He'll try an' not hu't you much. But he's tellin' you now dat he cain't stay aroun' hyar very long. He's got er engagement. I'se got some money to deposit," he leered.

Denny said nothing. He had been warned that Jenkins was a great kidder and would try to rouse him to anger; but the black's chaffing did not worry him; nothing about Jenkins worried Denny. He knew that he was hollow. He could tell it from his face.

The boy's silence excited the champion to flannel-throated laughter.

"Look at li'l massa," he jerked back over his shoulder to his seconds. "Jes' look at li'l massa, will you? He's too proud to talk wid a nigger. Why, he's got his back up wid ol' Jake."

Denny said nothing.

The two went back to their corners and

were fitted into their gloves. Behind him Denny could hear Burns and his friends holding a mourners' session. The Skipper was frankly near tears. Before him, about him, below and above, rising tier on tier, the boy could see nothing but faces and eyes, eyes and faces. From the seats nearest, especially from the newspaper section, he met many glances, some of interest, and some of amusement, but the far greater number of pity.

His lips just moved in a smile. They didn't know that Jenkins was hollow.

"Denny, lad," whispered Saunders, leaning through the ropes. "Remember!"

"Yes, sir," said Denny.

A gong rang. Silence fell.

"Ready, li' massa," Jenkins sang out.

THEY met in the center of the ring and touched hands perfunctorily. Simultaneously they fell into a crouch, the hands held high and parallel with the chin, the elbows well in over the stomach. With the same slow, rocking movement of the shoulders they circled eye to eye.

A titter frothed from the audience and swelled into a laugh. The fighters, except for their skins, were so alike in pose it was truly ridiculous. The angle of their bodies, the slow, cat-like tread of their feet, the hunched shoulders, the lifted hands parallel with the chin—they were alike in all those things.

Jenkins's smile tightened a little as he heard that laugh. His lips lifted until his gums were revealed. It was no longer a smile, but a snarl.

He was smiling again immediately, but in those lifted lips Denny had seen the brute, and antipathy sang through him like a clarion call. He stepped in, feinted with his left at that grinning black face, and drove his right in wickedly just below the arch of the other's breastbone.

The blow landed cleanly, resoundingly. The crowd acclaimed.

Again Jenkins's gums showed as he leaped upon the boy like a lithe black panther. He struck as swiftly as a released steel spring, short, jerking blows to the head.

But Denny's hands were there. Glove met only glove. Rocking, swaying, he slipped inside the blows until his chin was against the negro's shoulder. Almost leaning against each other they stood and exchanged rights and lefts to the body. Roughly the champion thrust Denny away. His incredibly swift upper-cut just flicked the boy's brow.

"Why, li'l massa," he cried reproachfully, as he dropped his hands and straightened up. "Is you tryin' to steal ol' Jake's bus'ness? I didn't think you'd be er copy-cat. If you insists on fightin' dataway, why I'll fight disaway."

He leaned backward, arms extended in burlesque mimicry of Fitzsimmons's famous pose. Denny said nothing. Shoulders hunched, he rocked in slowly.

"Jake!" called Ike Richards warningly.

The negro gave his mellow, throaty laugh and relaxed into a crouch.

"Come on, den, li'l massa. Ol' Jake will tickle ribs wid you."

Denny came on. He slid past a pair of wicked drives at his face until his chin rested against Jenkins's shoulders. The gloves drummed against white body and black.

"Keep away from him! Oh, keep away from him!" wailed Skipper Burns.

But Denny would not keep away. Again and again, before the bell rang, he slid in under those head blows to offer his body in exchange for Jake Jenkins's. Again and again the black thrust him away, and his vicious upper-cut just grazed the boy's brow.

Denny was much embarrassed by the attentions of his helpers during the rest. Such solicitude was entirely new to him. Besides it was unnecessary. His daily work with Williamson had been just as exacting as this.

Skipper Burns squatted before him and took the boy's legs upon his thighs and kneaded them frantically, as if the whole issue depended upon it.

"Don't step into him!" he implored. "For Gawd's sake, keep away, Denny. He'll reach your chin yet—and when he does—Don't step into him! We've got to give the crowd a run for their money."

The boy looked down at him with a faint smile. He wondered why the Skipper's fat cheeks should shake so and his voice sound so thin and dry. Didn't he know that Jake Jenkins was hollow? Or was that just his own and Saunders's secret?

The bell rang. Silence fell.

"Here I is, li'l massa."

Shoulders hunched, the boy rocked in.

The second round was like the first, the third like the preceding two.

For Denny the negro had no head. For him there was only that black barrel, which was hollow. And the boy might as well have had no head also, for all it availed Jake Jenkins. Always his steel-spring blows met those lifted hands, always that parting upper-cut just grazed Denny's brow, or flicked the little lock of blond hair that fell over it.

Jenkins was meeting with his very own defense, executed as perfectly as he himself had ever executed it. They met and drummed against each other's ribs, parted and met again.

Three rounds, and neither man visibly marked. But there had been plenty of action, and the crowd exhaled a vast sigh of content.

Jenkins continued to smile, to joke. He joked with the referee, with the men in his corner, with friends at the ring-side, with Denny. The latter answered never a word. He rocked in, pressed his chin against that black shoulder, drove his fists into that black body, always just below the arch of the breastbone!

"Jes' look at li'l massa hittin' ol' Jake! Why, son, you ought-a be arrested for pickin' on er ol' man lak Jake. What you tryin' to do—cave him in?"

And then Denny spoke his only word during the entire fight.

"Yes," he said.

The negro's gums just showed for a moment.

"Three rounds! That ain't so bad," grumbled Burns, as he pummeled Denny's legs. "And you feel all right, don't you, kid? You'll last, won't you?" he implored tearfully. "And don't let him get to your chin! He's been comin' so close it makes my heart stop dead."

Denny wondered. Why shouldn't he feel all right? Body blows—what were they? They only made his skin feel warm. And all this talk about his chin! He wasn't aware that Jenkins had been driving at it continually. He couldn't remember having tried to guard it.

Nor had he consciously tried to protect his chin any more than he had consciously avoided those blows to his face as he rocked in under Jenkins's guard. All his defense had been subconscious, without effort of will on his part, the result, probably, of some supersensitive instinct. All his will and his brain were focused upon one purpose—to reach Jenkins's hollow body and cave it in.

He was as little aware of the real animus directing this purpose as he was with the details of his defense. He knew he hated Jenkins with a cold, consuming hatred, but he hardly knew why, unless it was because he had seen hatred of the black in Saunders's dark blue eyes. That, too, was instinctive, the instinctive hatred of the clean for the sullied, of the humanized for the brute.

Now and then, looking over the negro's glistening shoulder, his eyes met Saunders's eyes. That look ever gave him a fresh impetus.

He thought he wanted to cave Jenkins in because Saunders had told him to; he did not dream the reason was a far loftier one than the desire of one man. How could an ignorant mine boy be expected to know that he was impregnated with the same vicious zeal that animated the Puritan and the Jesuit?

The fourth round was like the third—the second, the first—the same but more of it. Jenkins, ever laughing, ever joking, showed a certain reluctance about closing in, and that reluctance only fired Denny to greater insistence. He would not be denied. The black could not avoid him, he could not beat him off. Rocking, gliding, he slipped in under a fruitless volley to the head.

Jenkins had no choice but fight according to the other's choosing. He had to fight back or go into a clinch; and his childish conceit would not allow of that. What would be said if he, the champion, were seen to be holding on because of Dennis Boone, a mere tyro? There were fifteen thousand people out there, some of whom had seen him batter down the best, all of whom had heard of it. There were newspaper men—friends and satellites!—his wife!

He did not clinch. When he could no longer keep the boy off, he met him shoulder to shoulder, trading body for body. Jake Jenkins was no coward; only he was hollow.

His laugh rang out as mellowly, his jokes flew as fast.

"Li'l massa, seems to me you is sittin' up mighty late. Ain't it about yo' bedtime, li'l massa? I reckon ol' Jake had better rock dis baby to sleep purty soon."

Denny said nothing. He rocked, he glided in, he drove at that arch below the breastbone. There was something inevitable about it. Now when his blows landed he could hear little short pants issue from the negro's mouth, close by his ear. Now he discovered that that black body was elastic, began to give a little under his blows.

"Four rounds," croaked Burns, with a falsetto laugh. "If I do say so, Denny, you're doin'——fine. There ain't many that could trade with Jake and last four rounds. How you save your chin I dunno."

They were drenching Denny with water, fanning him with towels, spluttering advice in his ear.

Suddenly he turned his head. He was not surprised to find Saunders's eyes waiting for his. Very slowly he nodded, and Denny nodded back. That one glance seemed to convey perfect understanding.

The gong rang. The crowd grew hushed. The fighters advanced, rocking, crouching.

"Gettin' close to by-by time, li'l massa. Come to yo' ol' Jake's arms."

Denny came swiftly. He slid past Jenkins's blows, and refused to be ousted. His arms worked as regularly as a machine, Jenkins's arms likewise.

And then, without warning, the black's body was pressed against his, the black's arms circled and pressed down his arms. The champion had clinched at last!

Denny strained backward, but still Jenkins clung to him. Their cheeks scraped moistly, and then the eye of one was looking into the eye of the other, close, very close, unclouded blue eye looking into mottled brown. And the brown fell.

The champion thrust Denny away and sprang back. His crouch became accentuated, his arms folded across his stomach.

"I'se quit funnin' wid you! You hear?"

Denny said nothing. He rocked forward. Like an animal Jenkins sprang and struck and struck again. But glove met only glove. Denny slipped through the blows as water slips through one's fingers. His chin rested on the black shoulder, his hands alternated upon that one spot just below the breastbone.

Jenkins thrust him away, crouched, sprang and struck. Inside crept Denny, jabbing, jabbing.

Again the negro thrust him away, but this time he did not spring. He crouched, waiting.

"Watch him!" wailed Skipper Burns. "Keep away from him!"

But Denny would not keep away. The grin was frozen to Jenkins's face. He looked as he had looked at the start. Only Denny knew, for he had felt that black body giving more and more, and the pants issuing close to his ear had been like low, hurt cries. He glided in and struck.

Suddenly, as before, the black's body was pressed against his, Jenkins's arms circled his arms. But they did not cling. They began to slide down.

They slid to Denny's elbows, to his wrists. It was very still. The negro's wailing cry slit through the silence like a knife-blade through paper.

"O—Lawdy!"

His arms slipped to Denny's thighs and clung a moment. Now they were around the boy's knees.

Before him Denny saw an arm, an arm in a pink-striped shirt-sleeve, outstretched. He looked down. Jenkins lay across his feet. When he looked up again, the arm in the pink-striped shirt-sleeve was rising and falling.

The touch of the negro's moist flesh against his shins was disagreeable, and the boy stepped back. Jenkins rolled over limply and turned a face hideously drawn with pain up to the sunlight. He had been caved in.

Denny looked up with the ghost of a smile to find the world-famous referee staring at him with what almost amounted to horror.

"I knew I would do it," he said simply.

"Huh!" croaked the referee. "You knew it? Kid, do you realize you've knocked out Jake Jenkins—*in five rounds?*"

"Sure; he was hollow."

"And that you're—champion of the world?"

"Huh?" said Denny in his turn.

He looked about him dazedly. Champion! He became aware of all those faces and all those eyes, of a terrifying volume of sound. He had to brace his feet wide apart; he had to grasp at that arm in the pink-striped shirt-sleeve to keep from falling.

Champion of the world! The thought had never entered his head.

And just because the thought had never entered his head is the big reason why——

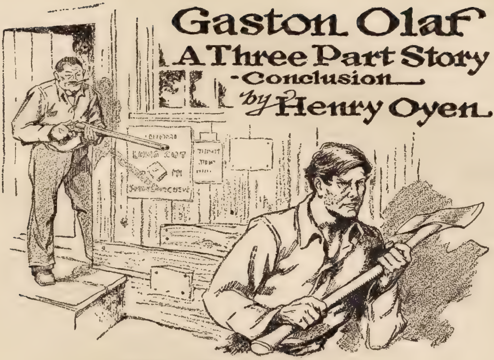
But we will leave that to the moralists.

Gaston Olaf

A Three Part Story

-Conclusion

by Henry Oyen



Author of "The Snow Burner," "The Man Trail", etc.

SYNOPSIS—Havens Falls is one of the last lumber settlements on the St. Croix River, Wisconsin. In it, one faction, led by *Devil Dave Taggart*, lumber king, is working to keep the town lawless so that decent people, who might investigate his timber operations, will not live there.

Richard Hale, *Dr. Sanders*, and *Rose Havens* lead the respectable element. But they are losing out, when into the settlement flies *Gaston Olaf François Thorson*, a fighting young giant, of French-Norse descent, with his partner, *Tom Pine*. *Gaston* saves *Miss Havens* from the insults of *"Red-Shirt" Murphy*, leader and driver of *Taggart's* lumbermen, who are derelicts from every camp in the North, working under *Devil Dave's* wing, since he will protect them from the law. *Gaston* whips *Murphy* in a saloon, which forces *Rose Havens* to believe him a common brawler. *Gaston* is bewildered and angry at this.

Gaston hires out to *Taggart* as boss in *Murphy's* place. He finds the timber tract about to be cut suspiciously well guarded by *Taggart's* men; also that back in the woods *Devil Dave* has a fine house, where live two women who carouse with him, and who, he tells *Gaston Olaf*, are his sister and niece.

Gaston decides *Taggart's* is no white man's outfit. He and *Tom Pine* leave it. On their way to Havens Falls they come upon *Hale*, who, while trying to approach *Taggart's* timber territory, has been shot in the leg. They rush him to the settlement. There *Gaston* learns that *Devil Dave* is really stealing timber owned by *Rose Havens*. And he has been aiding in the theft! *Gaston* goes over to the side of *Miss Havens*.

When *Taggart* sends the stolen logs down-stream that Spring, *Gaston* captures them all for *Rose Havens*, after a desperate fight. Whereupon *Taggart* claims he innocently cut her lumber and pays her $25,000 cash for the mistake. He then accuses *Gaston* of shooting his henchman *Murphy* and orders him to leave the country.

Gaston leaves, but returns secretly to Havens Falls in time to prevent *Murphy*, supposedly wounded, from stealing back the $25,000 from *Miss Havens*, at the instigation of *Taggart*. *Murphy*, however, escapes, and *Taggart* vanishes. A capitalist, *Lonergan*, arrives at the Falls. He plans to build a railroad through the St. Croix country and open the land for settlers. But first *Taggart's* gang must be cleaned out. *Gaston* is made Town Marshal. He plans to throttle lawlessness at its source; so, with *Tom Pine*, he strikes back into the woods after *Taggart* who has taken refuge in his forest house.

CHAPTER XXVII

TAGGART'S CHANCE

WHEN darkness had fallen sufficiently to hide their movements, they slipped down to the edge of the clearing. The lamps in the house were lighted, but the curtains were down.

"The old devil isn't taking any chances even out here in the woods," whispered Gaston. "Come on!"

As they moved into the clearing, an owl hooted: "Hoo, hoo, hoo!" from beside the house.

Gaston and Tom crept forward, pushing their rifles before them, until they were within striking distance of the open door.

Then at a signal they leaped forward. They were in the doorway, their rifle-muzzles covering the interior; the house was theirs.

"And you wish—gentlemen?"

The dark woman whom Gaston had seen at his previous visit to the house rose from a table; the little blonde looked up, laughing.

"Have some beer?" she tittered, holding forth a glass. "Or some trout? You're just in time for supper."

Gaston looked at the table. It was set for three.

"Where's the old man?" He pointed with the rifle-barrel at the third plate.

"Mina," called the dark woman.

From the kitchen a greasy squaw came forth, and at a signal sat down in the third chair.

"No, you don't," cried Gaston. "There's a bottle of champagne there; you aren't giving champagne to squaws."

"Serve the wine, Mina," said the dark woman.

The squaw obediently drew the cork and poured a glass for each of the women.

"And the third glass—how about that?"

"That's a mistake."

"It is; it gives you away. Tom, you take a look around. I'll watch here."

At the word Tom eagerly stormed through the house. Gaston could mark his progress as he kicked his way from room to room, and searched for hiding-places. In a few minutes he came running back, carrying in his hand Taggart's wide-brimmed hat.

"By the open back window, Gaston Olaf!" he cried. "He was here, but he's gone. This was knocked off his head getting away."

"Hoo-hoo!" hooted the owl outside, now farther away. "Hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo!"

Gaston and Tom looked at each other in disgust.

"That darn Injun!" growled Tom. "And men like me 'n' you couldn't tell the difference! And we didn't have sense enough to look for a trail leading out behind."

"Some wine?" smiled the dark woman, holding forth a glass.

"Or beer?" laughed the blonde. "You ought to get something out of your trip."

Gaston bowed low, cap in hand, in his very best manner.

"I beg your pardon, ladies. It was a bad mistake on our part. We should have watched both sides of the house. You may tell Mr. Taggart that he was too smart for us."

"Sit down," said the dark woman, smiling her best. "There's no use chasing him; he's got away by now. Won't you have some wine?"

"With the little knockout-drops in? No, thanks. You've already gained a few minutes for Taggart, though. So we must bid you good-by."

The little blonde made one bid to hold them longer.

"Gee! Big man. I believe I could leave Taggart for you."

"Good-night. I'm sorry——"

He saw that the girl was laughing at something and glanced toward the open window.

Taggart, standing outside, was leaning over the sill, carefully covering Gaston and Tom with a double-barreled shot-gun. There was no need for speech. Gaston and Tom were too experienced to take chances with such wicked, business-like eyes as gleamed at them over the barrels. It was life or death, the decision to be made in a split second, and they froze stiff, their rifles hanging harmlessly under their arms.

"That's right." Taggart's fangs showed as he smiled. He had been drinking. "A move and—well, we won't speak of what would have happened. The—the tables are slightly turned, aren't they, Thorson? You're not the big man just at present. No, just now you look like an ordinary whipped dog. And, like every dog who gets in my way, you've had your day."

Gaston's eyes looked down the gun-barrel into the eyes of Taggart. There in the terrible, silent conflict of wills the issue was decided.

"Ah, Taggart! You've had your last chance to get me out of your way." Gaston's voice rang with the fiber of triumph. "Pull that trigger. Touch her off. Blow my head off. That's your only chance. And that's gone now. It was gone the second after you got the drop. You could have done it then, while our backs were to you. You can't do it now. Your chance is gone—see? You can't look me in the eye and do it. It isn't in you, Taggart. You're trying, but it won't work. You're done for. Your chance is gone. I'll drive you out of the country now. Look at his gun wobbling. Look! Look!"

Like a flash he threw himself backward, knocking Tom Pine under him. His long legs flew out, kicking the table smack into the window where Taggart stood.

The shotgun roared ineffectually. The big kerosene lamp on the table exploded, flirting liquid flame about the room.

There was a hell's medley of flame and screams, of cursing and scrambling, as the women blindly threw themselves about to escape the flames. Tom and Gaston thrust the women to safety through the open door, and running into the next room made their escape through a rear window.

"Into the brush!" commanded Gaston. "The Indian's around somewhere. He'll have a shotgun, too."

From a hiding-place in the brush they looked back at the clearing. The cottage was spouting flame at every window. The clearing was brilliantly illuminated, but the light revealed no trace of Taggart or the women. Apparently they had fled the moment that it was certain that the cottage was doomed, not wishing to be found by any one whom the flames might draw from the woods.

The same thought was in Gaston's mind, and, when it became apparent that the danger from Taggart's shotgun was passed, he caught Tom by the arm and led the way into the timber.

On a ridge a mile away they dropped on the ground and lay looking back. Up in the dark sky hung a red-tinted pall, the reflection of the burning building. In that waste of dead, black forest the scene was appalling, an angry splotch of passion in a sea of peace.

Higher and fiercer rose the flames, licking eagerly at the rich furnishings of the den, and redder and larger grew the glow in the sky. The fire rose rapidly to its climax, spouted high as the roof fell in, then gradually began to subside, while minute by minute the nightly gloom of the forest crept slowly back to its own.

"Good enough," said Gaston at last. "That's a good sign. Taggart's been burnt out of one of his dirty nests. May the good work go on!"

Tom Pine was rubbing his brow in perplexity.

"What happened?" he demanded. "What for did you go to rile him up so sudden, Gaston Olaf? We might 'a' got hurt."

"It was our only chance. We had to rattle him. He got mad; I saw by his eyes that he'd loosened his trigger grip. Then I dropped and kicked the table. I had the thing worked out fine."

"Pretty fine," agreed Tom dubiously. "That's the closest I ever heard buck-shot whistle past this old head. If it had been any finer——"

"I wouldn't have made a move," Gaston laughed. "We certainly didn't come away from there with any credit, Tom. Walked into it with our eyes wide open and blind."

"Ye-es. It wasn't so bad, though; we were able to walk out again. We didn't take anything away, but we didn't leave anything, either. Now, what next?"

"We'll keep on walking. The chances are Taggart'll have his sheriff and posse out here looking for us as soon as he can send 'em word. They'll search this neck of the woods pretty close, and there'll be too many of 'em for us; so we'll travel. Come on!"

He set out, picking his way dexterously through the dark woods, at a good pace, and Tom followed obediently. The course lay straight westward for two miles, to the bank of a small creek running north and south.

"Here's where we lose 'em when they come to follow us," said Gaston and plunged into the water.

Tom followed. They went down-stream a short distance and came out upon a sandbar, leaving their tracks large and plain, pointing westward.

After losing their trail in a swamp they reentered the creek and waded up-stream for half a mile to where a tangled windfall permitted them to quit the stream, on the eastern side, without touching the ground and making tracks. Their course now lay eastward and slightly to the north.

They traveled steadily for most of the night. Shortly before daybreak they searched for and found a small, well-built shanty in the midst of a good growth of timber. Tom Pine laughed as they entered and, by feeling, found matches where they had left them the day they started for Havens Falls.

"Home again!" he cried.

"Yes," said Gaston. "We'll lay low on our claims here for a couple of days. We'll hit back to town to be there Saturday night."

"Saturday night? Why then?"

"Because then I figure the pot'll be about due to boil over."

CHAPTER XXVIII

SATURDAY NIGHT

IT WAS drive-time on the La Croix; it was pay-day for the camps; and it was Saturday night in Havens Falls.

For such nights existed the river-fronts of river towns in the bad old days; on such nights was made the lurid history that is remembered even now, when river towns, as they were, have ceased to exist. Mad, glorious nights after sober days of bone-testing toil.

No one who has seen a river town on such a night will ever forget it, even though the recollection is accompanied by a shudder. Then the men came in off the drive, wet with the water which had snatched at their lives during the day, mad with the hunger for a night's excitement before going back to their toil. Then from out of the woods came the camp-men in bodily condition like unto a prize-fighter in training, mentally akin to bucks in rutting time, prowling about for a chance to fight. There assembled on such occasions dozens of the most daring, reckless, muscular men who ever inhabited this continent. In their pockets they carried money running often into the hundreds.

To the right and left the red lights blinked, and music tinkled, advertising the things that the river-front had to give in exchange for money. Supply follows the demand. Whisky and women; lights and music; gambling and association with their kind; noise and strife—these were the things that the excitement-hungry woodsmen craved, and these were the things that the river-front brazenly announced itself ready to supply.

In a mud-chinked log building, with trees swaying at its back door, one found a gleaming, polished dancefloor, where, by standing in line, and for a price, one might dance with a tiny blonde, with the features of a Madonna and the eyes of a snake. In the curtained boxes lumber-jacks had the privilege of ordering the same brands of champagne that wine-agents advertise along Broadway.

Old lumber-jacks, mackinawed and shoepacked, beards reeking with tobacco-juice, but pockets filled with money, staggered about the floor, holding in their arms girls young enough to be their daughters. Young jacks, slim, clean-eyed boys, spent their money on painted things old enough to be their mothers.

Next door one could gamble at anything from chuck-luck to roulette. Any lumber-jack who by accident won a few dollars, calculated to hold his winnings by the strength of his good right arm.

But these devices of pleasure were but supplements to whisky. It was the bars over which liquor was served that drew the men and furnished reasons for the other things; and it was in the bare saloons that the greatest crowds were to be found and the most violent actions indulged in.

On this Saturday night, while Gaston and Tom Pine were wending their way to town, there were probably a hundred and fifty men from the woods in Havens Falls. Jack McCarthy's saloon, being the largest in the settlement, drew the largest part of this number.

McCarthy was experienced in such occasions, and he knew that serious rows were no source of profit to his till. Hence, early in the evening, he seated himself on a stool just inside the door. Twenty-five per cent. of the lumber-jacks came into town bearing rifles. As such a one entered McCarthy's place the proprietor crooked a finger and pointed at a corner behind the bar. The lumber-jack promptly placed his weapon with the others deposited there. There were twoscore rifles behind McCarthy's bar that night before the fun had fairly begun.

Gaston and Tom entered the settlement shortly after dark and at once made their way unobserved into Dr. Sanders's back room. The doctor greeted them with great surprise and greater relief.

"Boys—boys! I'd almost lost hope of seeing you again."

"Why so?"

"For good and sufficient reasons. First, because of the way you disappeared without leaving any word. That worried me, but I figured you might have done that for a reason. But when the sheriff and his gang went hunting you——"

"Oh! They did hunt for us, then?"

"Hunt for you? Boys, they certainly did. They made a sudden raid on the hotel, surrounded it and forced their way in. You were gone. As near as I could figure it you'd been gone about twenty minutes when the raid came. Then they searched the town. They——"

"Did they go up there?" Gaston nodded in the direction of the Havens home.

"They did. Miss Rose invited the sheriff to go through and see that you weren't hiding there. She told him you wouldn't hide from a man like him. Yes, they went through the whole town.

"Then that night they got word and went into the bush after you. I heard that they'd heard where you were. Then they came back and said they'd run you out of the country, and boys, I was—hm, hm—I was afraid they'd caught you and put you out of business. And, say, somebody else was worrying, too, and I think you ought to show yourself up there as soon as you can."

"All right. And what's happened since then?"

"Oh, the sheriff and most of his gang have gone back to La Croix. But the crowd that's in town tonight—hm, hm—there'll be Billy the Devil to pay before morning."

"What's up?"

"Well, the crew that you took the drive away from has been trying to clean out the town. The rest of the men have been giving them the laugh. There are a lot of men in town who haven't any use for Taggart, although they've been in his camps. There's the crew from Camp One, forty men or more, just paid off. They've heard about what you did to that drive, and Taggart can't show himself without getting the merry ha-ha! There have been half a dozen small riots already. Taggart's bullies have been trying to choke off the fellows who dare to talk about how you took the drive."

"Have they been able to do it?" asked Gaston with great interest.

"Not much! There are too many of the other fellows. But the bullies have turned to this end of town. Red-Shirt Murphy knocked a kid down and robbed him across the street there just a few minutes ago."

"Red Shirt, eh? And Taggart—what's he up to?"

"Hm, hm. He's keeping himself hidden. But—whisper—the old man's been drinking his head off these last two days, and he's egging his bullies on."

"Fine!" laughed Gaston.

"What?"

"Fine! Then the chances are that old Davy will try to do something tonight to still the laughter and make people remember that he's still the boss man along the La Croix."

"That's just how we figure it."

"And Red-Shirt Murphy has committed a crime. Were there any witnesses?"

"Half a dozen."

"Fine again. I'm marshal of Havens Falls; it's my duty to arrest any one who commits a crime. Murphy will be the first victim of law and order in Havens Falls."

"Man, dear! On a night like this——"

"Just the time. The way to break a jam is to break her when she's keyed up tightest."

He moved toward the door, the rear door, for the time to reveal himself to the settlement had not arrived.

"You wait here for me a few minutes, Tom," he said easily.

"Nix. You don't go, leaving me out of any of this fun," protested Tom.

"The fun doesn't start just yet. I've—I've got something else to do just now."

"Yes—hm, hm," said the doctor. "She'll be glad to see that you're back."

GASTON went directly to the Havens house. It was a warm, dark night and in his rubber-soled shoes he made no more noise than a cat as he came swiftly up to the door. The door was open, as was a window at one side.

The front room was brightly lighted and Gaston could not help looking in, and having looked could not help hearing what was being said. It halted him, and he stood looking and listening.

Hale was in the room with Rose and Mrs. Havens. Hale was on his feet, speaking, and his strong, round face wore a look of worry.

"I think you ought to go. If I had the power I would make you go. This is no time for you to stay here."

"Are you going away, too?" asked Rose.

"Of course not. That's different. But there's no reason why you should stay. We can't tell what they'll do before morning. I'll give you my team and a driver and you can go down to La Croix and wait until the thing blows over."

Rose smiled.

"If you will drive us, Dick——"

"Oh, you know I can't do that. A man can't run away."

"But a woman—a girl—can?"

"Certainly. That's common sense."

"We're going to stay here, Dick." Rose was very quiet. "I know how well you mean it—but we will not run away."

"Bravo!" cried Gaston, striding in. They started at the sight of him; but Gaston looked only at Rose, and his heart swelled at the look she gave him. "I apologize for hearing what wasn't intended for my ears. I was just coming in. Miss Havens, with you here we know we must keep Taggart's outfit away from this end of town; and if we must, we can."

He laughed as he spoke. His spirits were at top crest. The situation, the opportunity to fight to protect Rose, was like wine to his blood. It lifted him, made his heart beat madly. He felt strong enough to fight the world; he had a mad impulse to go forth singing, to battle single-handed with the gang in its lairs.

And then he remembered. Those mad, joyous, impractical impulses and actions were no longer for him. That was past. For him, sober, respectable, practical effort.

He heaved a sigh as he noted that Rose's eyes were comparing him to Hale. The comparison scarcely could be favorable to him, he knew. His fringed buckskin trousers, high-top rubbers, flaming red sash and carelessly buttoned shirt were in dire contrast to Hale's neat store-clothes. In the woods, the odds would have been in his favor; here it was obviously Hale who had the better of it.

As they questioned him about his absence and return, Gaston made a mental note that he would change to "town clothes" as soon as the opportunity offered. And then he must hold himself in, must suppress those reckless impulses, and make himself into a regular respectable citizen.

"I can win her," whispered Gaston's instinct. "But I've got to tame myself—I've got to quiet down."

As a beginning he reconsidered his words concerning Hale's suggestion that Rose and her mother leave town.

"Perhaps it would be the right thing to do," he suggested; but Rose laughed at his sudden change of front.

"If we had decided to stay before you were here, certainly we won't change our minds now that you've come."

"Well," said Gaston dubiously, "I don't know. It's always best to be safe, and you'd surely be safer down at La Croix than you are here."

Rose thanked him with a look.

"I'm very glad to hear you talk in that tone," she said, "but I'm sure you don't really think there's any danger to us here. Do you?"

"As Hale says, you'd surely be safe in La Croix," he replied evasively.

"But as you said, since we're going to stay here, we'll be assured safety. So here we stay."

Hale presently excused himself.

"I want to see Lonergan," he explained.

"Hello!" exclaimed Gaston. "Lonergan here?"

"Yes. He's here with half-a-dozen men. He's preparing to lay out his line between La Croix and here."

"That will help. That means seven more men on our side."

"Yes. Good men, too. I must tell Lonergan you're back in town."

Gaston left the house soon after Hale, and Rose followed him to the gate.

"Well," he said in parting, "you see I'm living up to my promise to change my ways. I ran away and hid when the sheriff's gang was after me, and I've been avoiding trouble ever since."

"I am glad," she said.

"So am I. I'm glad that—that you wanted me to change."

Without thinking what he did, his fingers strayed down and reached her hand. But at the thrill that went through them both at the touch, he came to himself and drew his hand away. He had no right to do that, or think of it—yet.

"Good night," he said suddenly. "I must go."

"Promise me you'll be careful this evening? That you won't do anything—wild?"

"Nothing wild," he said solemnly. "That's all over. I'll prove to you that it is. Don't you believe it is?"

"I hope — yes, I believe it is. Good night."

"Good night, and—I'll remember."

He meant it. He really felt that he was tamed. But he was soon to learn how badly he was mistaken.

CHAPTER XXIX

A FIGHT

AS GASTON went back toward Dr. Sanders's office there came up from the river-front a muffled roar of rage and disappointment that froze him in his tracks, and he stood looking down toward where men surged wildly to and fro in the gleam of the lights from opened windows and doors. Something had happened down there that had brought sudden anger to a large number of the crowd.

The shouting came from one of the larger saloons, and after the first sudden explosion of anger there followed an insistent clamor, apparently for revenge.

Ever since he had heard from Dr. Sanders that a large percentage of the men in town were laughing at Taggart and his gang, and that the gang was growling over it, Gaston had been imbued with a wild hope: if the two elements would get to fighting each other, the gang would be too busy to turn seriously on the decent people of the town. He had just promised Rose that he would be careful; and to stand to one side and let the two sides fight among themselves was the height of caution.

At first he had planned to go down and arrest Red-Shirt Murphy before the eyes of his friends, casting the challenge of law and order in their teeth. But this would inevitably have precipitated a conflict between the gang and the decent citizens. So now as he moved alone down toward the riverfront, without troubling to call for Tom, it was in his mind only to conduct a secret scouting expedition and ascertain, if possible, whether there was a prospect that the two elements in the crowd would clash in battle. If so, he and the other respectable citizens of Havens Falls had only to hold themselves to their upper part of town and pray that the outsiders would lick Taggart's men to the last whisper.

In this cautious frame of mind, Gaston, aided by the dark night, soon was mingling with the crowd before the building whence came the clamor.

"What's the row here, neighbor?" he asked, keeping his face averted from the stranger whom he addressed.

"Oh, he just knocked another of our boys colder'n a dead fish," was the nonchalant reply.

"Who did?" asked Gaston carelessly.

Before his informant could reply there came a shout from the doorway.

"Gangway there—gangway! Open up, so he can get some air."

Shouldering and cursing, their faces cold and ugly with rage, came two middle-aged woodsmen dragging between them the limp, bloody figure of a curly-headed youth. The boy was nearly as big as Gaston. The two men carried him, each holding him up by the arms, his head rolling drunkenly, his feet dragging helplessly on the ground. His face was smashed red and raw, and there was a cruel gash in the back of his head. Outside the crowd, which only glanced at him and turned away to view what was going on in the saloon, they laid him down and splashed water in his face. There were half a dozen in the circle about him, tried, hard-bitten men of the woods, and Gaston saw that they were all strangers to him.

"He's got his gloves loaded," muttered the battered youth, as consciousness returned. "I tell you there's lead in those gloves of his."

"Shut up!" commanded one of the men who had carried him out. "Doesn't make any difference if there was dynamite in 'em; we said we could find a man to lick him. Boys," he turned to the little group, "how about it? Are we going to let that darn prize-fighter brag about licking three of our boys without anybody getting him?"

"Lemme go back at him!" pleaded the youth. "I was half stewed when I got into the ring with him. Head's cleared now; I can handle him now, boys."

"You can't handle yourself—lay down! You handled your mitts like a Swede."

"We got to get him licked," growled another man. "We can't hold up our heads if we don't."

Gaston's blood leaped quickly. Forgotten was the new policy of caution. Here was a chance to win Crew One as his devoted followers!

"Well, rustle around," continued the spokesman. "Get some one. Who can we get? Tim Blake, he's licked, and Big Robideau, and—Erik here."

"Them's the best men from our crew."

"Well, somebody else, then. Holy, suffering Moses! Anybody. Let's go hunt for some one."

They started back toward the crowd.

"Hold on, boys."

They swung back. Gaston had stepped out of the darkness and was standing beside the fallen youth. With one glance of their sharp eyes those woodsmen appraised him. Then they came toward him, respectfully, eagerly.

"What's going on, boys?" asked Gaston. "Some champion in town?"

They looked him over in silence.

"Stranger," exploded their spokesman, "can you handle your mitts at all?"

"Have done so," replied Gaston. "What's up?"

"A knocker-out in Sam's Place. A professional. Bets any amount he can knock out any man in two rounds. He's cleaned three of our boys so far."

"Where you from, neighbor?" queried another voice.

"Don't make no difference where he's from," cried the spokesman. "Question is: will you take a whirl at this loud guy?"

"Oh, I don't mind," said Gaston.

"Then he's one of our crew—Crew One—no matter where he's from. Come on. Gangway there, you town hoboes. We got a man to clean your champion now. Come on, boys!"

Gaston paused to bend over the battered youth.

"How did he give you that clip in the back of the head, boy?" he asked.

"Loaded gloves, I tell you," insisted the boy. "I can tell when lead hits me, can't I?"

"Lead nothing," said some one. "He lets you feel of his gloves. But he strikes an awful blow, stranger. The boys have dropped like they was shot."

"All right."

They were at the doorway of the saloon now. The place was crowded with men. At the farther end of the room was a tiny stage, on which usually singers and dancers held forth. Tonight two ropes were stretched across the front of the stage. The two side walls and a canvas drop at the back constituted the other three sides of the ring.

Through the haze of tobacco-smoke, which hung like clouds about the hanging oil-lamps, Gaston could make out the figure of the fighter leaning over the ropes, gloves on his hands, sneering at the crowd, while at his side a hawk-nosed gambler cried:

"Come on, boys; bring up your fighting men! Even money, any amount, you haven't got a man can stay two three-minute rounds with the 'Butcher Boy.' He only weighs a hundred sixty-five, boys. Come on, some of you fire-eaters; get the easy money."

Gaston looked over the crowd first of all. He recognized here and there one of Taggart's men, Red-Shirt Murphy among them, but to his satisfaction he saw that more than half of the men were strangers to him. They were the outsiders, the men who had laughed at Taggart because of the trick of the stolen drive, and just at present they were begging for somebody to step up and knock that guy's block off.

The men who were to be counted as Taggart's were with the pugilist. It was their turn to laugh now, and they were taunting the outsiders with the failure of their would-be champions.

"Get a good man!" they sneered. "What's the matter, Crew One? Haven't you got one good man among you?"

The air of the room was heavy with tension. The outsiders were taking these taunts in ominous silence.

Gaston looked at the prize-fighter last of all. The man was of medium height with enormous neck and shoulders and a small shaved head. His thick, gnarled arms and bowed legs told of great strength, but it seemed rather the slow, heavy strength of the wrestler than the speed and power of the pugilist.

"What's the matter? Haven't you got a good man?" howled the fighter's partisans.

"You darn know it!" came back the reply from the door, and Gaston Olaf and his six new-found friends came rushing down the room to the ring.

In a vague, far-away sort of fashion Gaston Olaf realized that he had taken upon himself a desperate venture. A small, still voice was whispering to him that this was a dangerous thing to do; that Taggart's men would recognize him; that they would seek to collect the price which he knew Taggart must have set on his head.

But the voice was so small that he scarcely heard it; the realization of danger came to him from far away and as through a fog. What he realized keenly was that his veins were throbbing with excitement. And now under the spur of the moment he realized that this was what his nature craved above all things, that he had stepped into his present dangerous position because his real nature had led him to it.

These thoughts came and went in one troubled flash. Then he was the old reckless, dare-devil Gaston, glorying in the power of his young giant's body, thrilled to the core by the prospect of the fight ahead of him. He laughed boyishly; he was happy.

There was a moment of stillness as he climbed through the ropes. Taggart's men, recognizing him, were awed to silence by his audacity at appearing in such a place. Then the outsiders broke into a whoop and crowded forward, clamoring to bet what remained of their rolls on this new champion.

The pugilist looked Gaston over with a horrible grimace, intended for a smile of contempt.

"Deh bigger dey are, deh harder dey fall," he barked. "Give 'im deh mitts, ref'ree. He's in fer an orful tumble, dis guy is. Here, feel o' my gloves, so yah won't holler dere's lead in 'em when I knock yah cold."

Gaston felt of the thin gloves. There was no hard substance in them.

"Here's yours."

The gambler, acting as referee, tossed him a pair of thin gloves similar to the pugilist's. Gaston was puzzled at the obvious confidence of the professional and the gambler. By their faces the fight was only a formality; it was as good as over, with him as another victim of the pug's prowess. Why was this? His keenly alert instinct suddenly cried out a warning. There was something wrong here; he must be on guard against a trick.

"Come on!" bellowed the gambler. "Anybody else want to back the big fellow against the little Butcher Boy?"

Gaston, leaning against the ropes in his corner, was watching the crowd. He saw Red-Shirt Murphy whispering with another man.

"Come on!" he cried. "Let's get started."

"Hi! D'you know who that big stiff is?" cried the man to whom Murphy had spoken.

"Don't know and don't care," replied the fighter.

"That's Thorson—that's the guy who stole the drive!"

The room was still for an instant. Then Gaston's backers lifted the roof with their shout.

"Hoop-la! Thorson! Bully boy! Clean him up like you cleaned Devil Dave. Eat 'im alive!"

The pugilist grinned, and the gambler looked bored. It was apparent that they cared not in the least about who Gaston was; all comers looked alike to them. What could the trick be that made them so confident?

Gaston looked swiftly around the ring. The ropes in front were all right; there could be no trick there. The sides were bare walls, all right. The rear was a sheet of canvas——

Gaston felt a slight chill along his spine and his breath came sharply. There were two tiny holes cut in the curtain, so tiny that in the poor light it required eyes as sharp as his to see them. And for a flash as he looked, then instantly disappearing, there showed behind each hole a watching eye.

"Something wrong behind that curtain," Gaston mused. "I'll keep away from it."

His thrill at the prospect of combat suddenly changed and gave place to a cold, seething rage. They would try an unfair trick on him, would they! His jaw set and his eyes flashed fire.

"Come on, you cheap, dirty crook!" he hissed. "I'll spoil your circus and break your head besides."

"No more bets? All bets on?"

"Our money's all up. Kill him, Thorson, eat him alive!"

"Knock him cold, Butcher Boy!" roared Red Shirt. "Then we'll give it to him right."

"Go!" shouted the gambler and leaped from the ring.

THE crowd surged forward, packing tightly against the ropes. Gaston had a flash of the first row, and, seeing half a dozen of Taggart's men there, knew that more trouble awaited him when the fight was over.

He had little time to think of this. The fighter came at him like a whirlwind. It was only a feint. Gaston led, the pug ducked, and Gaston suddenly found himself clinched and shoved toward the curtain. He broke the clinch without any trouble.

The fighter feinted and clinched again. This time he had a hold about the middle. With a heave he lifted Gaston from the floor and rushed him against the canvas hanging. Gaston threw himself forward even as his back touched the curtain and in that instant the secret of the fighter's success was revealed to him. A blow as from an ax took him on one side of the neck, but his forward movement had taken him too far away to permit the blow to land with full force. As it was it knocked him to his knees. Stars flew around his head; he felt nauseated, for a moment. And then he was on his feet, with a berserk bellow of rage.

The pug struck wildly, right and left, and turned and ran. Gaston caught him at the ropes. He grappled him neck and thigh and swung him over his head, roaring deep down in his chest. Without a flicker of hesitation the gambler reached for his gun, only to be dropped by the fists of two Crew One men who had been watching him for just such action.

Gaston steadied himself with the squirming man held above his head. It was a good ten feet across the ring. Gaston hurled his victim straight through the air into the canvas. The curtain ripped and came down, and the two black-jack men behind it were exposed with their weapons in their hands.

"There!" cried Gaston. "There's why your men lost, boys!"

CHAPTER XXX

THE COMING OF LAW AND ORDER

IT TOOK them a few seconds to realize what had happened. Was it possible? Had these town crooks really had the nerve to play such a trick on Crew One? For a moment they gaped; then they swore softly and swarmed toward the ring. A number of the gangsters made the mistake of trying to halt them and hold them back.

"Hoop-la!" cried the woodsmen, and the room full of men exploded in battle royal.

The small ring became a place where a dozen men were struggling instead of two. Down on the floor twoscore men met fist to fist. The outsiders were in the majority, and they were out to avenge the unfair tactics by which their men had been beaten, the taunts hurled at them, and the temporary loss of their money—temporary, because four of them stripped the gambler down to the last yellow diamond on his fingers.

In the ring Gaston fought furiously against odds until the rush of his friends carried his foes underfoot. He was marked, but he soon was satisfied with his share of the struggle, and he managed to free himself for a moment from the press.

The outsiders by this time had the whip-hand and the fight had become knock-down-and-drag-out. Taggart's gangsters were being hurled through doors and windows. Later they would return with reinforcements and the battle would be renewed, but for the time being the fight was all to Crew One.

It was no part of Gaston's program to take part in a general rough-house. He realized how greatly fortune had favored him in his desperate venture, and returning calmness dictated that he escape. In a jam near the door he caught sight of the flaming upper garment of Red-Shirt Murphy.

Murphy was cornered by two young lumber-jacks who were polishing him off to the queen's taste. A smile flitted over Gaston's face, and he dropped into the mêlée on the floor. It was the work of a few seconds to work his way through to the door.

"Let him go, boys," he commanded, clutching Murphy's arm. "He's my meat."

"All right, champeen," they said, and turned to hunt a fresh victim.

"Leggo me!" growled Murphy. "Hey, Taggart's men, here's Thorson. Knife him, somebody, knife the ——!"

Gaston twisted his arm behind him and thrust him outside. Two of Murphy's friends came running toward him.

"Out of the way," said Gaston. "I'm arresting Murphy for robbing that kid this evening. I'm marshal of this town. Pretty soon I'll come back and get some more of you. Out of the way. Hike!"

At a dog-trot he propelled Murphy ahead of him out of the crowd and up the street, before any one dared to make a move. The amazed gangsters stood dumfounded while Gaston ran his prisoner across the open space separating the two parts of town. He was in front of Hale's store before they moved. Then they shouted:

"Hi! Thorson's gobbled Red Shirt and's carrying him off. Come here to me. We got to get Red Shirt away."

Gaston threw his prisoner into Hale's store. Hale, Tom Pine, Dr. Sanders, Lonergan and six of his men, old Perkins, the postmaster and a few others, were assembled there.

"Here's the first prisoner of the first marshal of Havens Falls," announced Gaston. "Law and order has come, gentlemen. Guard him carefully. I'll be back in a minute."

He snatched his rifle from Tom Pine's hand and was outside and half-way back toward the red lights by the time Murphy's friends had gathered courage to follow. There were probably a dozen of them, and they came cursing up the street,demanding

Gaston's life, and the freedom of Murphy.

Where the light from a window streaked across the street Gaston drew a line in the sand with the toe of his shoe, and slung his rifle into the hollow of his arm.

"Here's where you fellows stop—right at this line," he said quietly. "First one across it gets what's in the old gun. Who wants it first?"

The gang stopped short. In the yellow flare of light Gaston was not a pleasant object to face. There was blood on his face from the fight; his shirt was torn in several places; his thick crop of hair was disordered till each hair seemed to be standing on end. And in the half-light his blue eyes gleamed wickedly.

He was very serious. There was no joy of battle about this. This was business, duty. It was something that had to be done, and he happened to be the man on whom the job of doing it had fallen.

"There's the line," he said. "That's the line that marks the coming of law and order to Havens Falls. You fellows have done just as you please up to now. You can't do that any more. Things have changed. I've been made marshal of this town. I'm here to tell you fellows your day of being top-loaders here is over. Understand? From now on I'll tell you what you can do and what you can't do in this town. And first of all you can't come up into this part of town. You can't cross that line. Do you understand?"

Gaston sensed that people were moving toward him from behind. He looked and saw that in the darkness at his back a crowd had gathered to his support. Nearest him were Tom Pine, Lonergan and Hale. Each of them was armed with a shotgun.

Dr. Sanders, Perkins, Lonergan's men and others were there, too, bringing the total number up to ten, all armed. They came silently, stretching across the street in a ragged line. It was a new business to most of them; their faces were white and they were breathing hard. But within them was the spirit of the town-makers, the men of homes, who bring order into the wilderness.

This was something that had to be done for the good of the town. Before them were the forces of lawlessness and disorder, from which they and theirs had suffered helplessly for so long. Behind them were their homes, their women, their children—all that was sacred in the world to them. And the time had come for them to stand out between these and the forces of evil.

They didn't like to do it; fighting wasn't in their line. But it had to be done. So they were doing it. And Taggart's gangsters looked at the silent line of white faces, and the formidable figure that led them, and grew weak. As always, the bravado courage of the bad man was as the recklessness of a boy in the face of the calm determination of law-abiding citizens defending their homes.

The two sides faced each other in silence; then Gaston's voice:

"Now toddle back to your boss. Tell him what's happened. Tell him this rule has come to stay. You fellows can't come up into this part of town any more. Then round up all of your gang and see if you can scare up nerve enough to come back and cross that line."

Then the tension broke. The gangsters began to slink back one by one. They went with curses on their lips. A dozen yards away they stopped and put their heads together.

"We'll come back, all right," growled one of them, as they continued their retreat. "And when we come, you fellows'll be glad to get out of town alive."

CHAPTER XXXI

TAGGART'S DEFIANCE

GASTON turned about and faced the posse which had assembled to his support. He did not laugh at the threat which had been hurled at them. The mood of recklessness had passed; he was as coldly serious and determined as the most sober citizen present.

"Well, we've served notice on them now," he said quietly.

His eyes ran swiftly up and down the line and suddenly he was filled with a great pride at the thought of being chosen leader by such men. With the exception of Tom Pine and a couple of reckless youngsters in Lonergan's crew, the business in hand was appalling to his followers. They were not men of violence; they were men with a hunger for orderly communities. Some of them actually were sick at stomach from the unaccustomed sensations of the situation. Yet not one of them but plainly told by the look on his face that he was ready to stand up and give life itself if necessary in order that the new rule of law and order might be established.

To Gaston, who always deprecated his own courage because the prospect of trouble only filled him with joy, there was something heroic in the courage of these quiet citizens. He saw them in a new light—especially Hale. Hale was handling his shotgun clumsily, but his eyes were as steady as Gaston's or Tom Pine's.

"Yes," said Lonergan, "we've served 'em notice. Now they've either got to pull their steel or back down."

"They won't back down," said Hale. "Taggart won't let 'em."

"Nope." Old Perkins was nervously chewing tobacco. "Nope, they won't back down."

"Neither will we," said another man.

"No," they said, almost as one.

"What did you do with Murphy?" asked Gaston.

"Put him in a shack back of the post-office with two men to guard him."

They stood looking down toward the red lights. It was quiet down there, but Gaston knew what trouble was boiling, and doubts assailed him as he considered the possible results to these men.

"Have I done right, boys?" he asked.

"You've done right."

"I've brought trouble coming to you."

"It had to come sometime. Better now than later."

"All right. They won't be back here for a little time at least. Let's go to Hale's store and decide what to do."

In the light of the store-lamps they saw the blood on his face.

"Hey!" cried Dr. Sanders. "I knew there'd be work for me tonight, but I didn't think it would start so soon. How'd you get that? Come here while I fix you up. Who gave it to you?"

Gaston opened his mouth to tell of the fight in the saloon, but stopped. Looking back upon it he saw suddenly how desperate and reckless had been his adventure. In the same instant he remembered how, but a short time ago, he had promised to be careful this night. He felt ashamed.

"Murphy's friends," he replied evasively, bending over the basin which the doctor had brought. "It doesn't amount to anything."

"Amounts to this," snapped Tom Pine, "you sneaked off and hogged the fun after promising to let me in on it."

"Don't worry; there'll be plenty more fun before this night's over. Now, let's put our heads together. I've arrested Murphy. He's our first prisoner. Those fellows will be after him, sure as we're living.

"Murphy's nothing but a big bum, and the best thing to do with him is to kick him out of town; but for the present he's important. We've got to keep him as a warning to 'em. So I guess there won't be much sleep for any of us tonight. Those fellows will try to nose around and find out where we've got him. We've got to meet them at that line out there and persuade 'em to keep on their own side of the fence."

"Right. You're the boss; give your orders."

"Well, I think this store is a good place for us to make camp in," said Gaston. "How many more men can we get together that we can depend upon?"

A silence fell over the room. Hale broke it.

"Counting the two men guarding Murphy, we're most of us here. There's three or four men more will be here later. Then there are some away who won't be back tonight. Count on an even dozen."

"A dozen?" repeated Gaston cheerfully. "Well, we'll have to make that do, then. We'll——"

"You'll raise ——, you will!"

A voice in the doorway brought the last man of them to his feet.

"You'll raise —— and put a foundation under it, you will!"

Taggart was standing there, his bulk filling the doorway. He was all alone. He was stiff-eyed from whisky; his fang-like teeth showed through his ragged beard in a leering grin; and he stood leaning forward, his huge hands curved before him like claws.

The sudden sight of him sent a chill down the back of most of those present. They realized fully now what they had to combat.

"Hello, Taggart," said Gaston easily. "Where's your shotgun?"

Taggart's head dropped further forward, his grin grew wider, and if ever eyes flashed fire his blood-shot optics did then.

"Thorson, if I was bothering about you any more I'd have brought a shotgun," he said thickly. "But you're—you're only one dog in a flock now, one cur in a crowd! And I've decided to whip the whole lot of you out of my country. Do you hear?" His voice suddenly rose to a demoniacal shout that shook the lamps under the ceiling. "The whole lot of you, curs—dogs, bitches, pups! Yes, and your kennels, too. You're all going together. Back up Thorson, will you? Follow him because he's dared to buck me, eh? Ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha-ha! Buck me!"

He paused.

"Buck me!" he repeated in a whisper, his face swelling horribly. Suddenly he swept his arm before him as if brushing something out of his way, and stepped back a step. "All of you — whipped dogs — get away. Take your women and kids and travel. For there'll be no kennels for you to bed down in when daylight comes in the morning!"

He was gone, lurching back out of sight in the darkness as suddenly as he had come.

The men in the store looked at one another. Old Perkins's shrill treble rose:

"Well, the dirty——!"

Then they all looked at Gaston. The doctor had halted in the act of putting sticking-plaster on a cut on his cheek, and Gaston was calmly completing the operation.

"Well—darn it, Doc, this stuff won't stick. Well, boys, now Devil Dave has served notice on us."

There was no reply; they were watching him. By his calmness they sensed that he was confident that the solution of their problem lay with him.

"Wha—what did he mean?" gasped a white-faced man.

"Mean?" said Gaston. "Huh! That's easy; he means that he's going to burn us out."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE POWER OF WOMAN

A MOMENT of horror-stricken silence followed Gaston's words.

"Well, the dirty ——!" repeated old Perkins.

"Burn us out? Good God! He wouldn't dare do that!"

"You saw him, didn't you?" said Gaston. "Did he look like a man who'd stop at anything?"

Lonergan shook his head.

"He'll do it—if he can. He's done things like it before."

Tom Pine cleared his throat noisily.

"I could have shot him right where he stood," he said, puzzled. "I had my gun right here. And I was thinking: 'You crooked old whelp, I'll do one good thing in this world and rid it of you.' But I couldn't do it. Darn your law and order! it's making me soft, too."

"Well?" demanded Perkins. "What are we going to do now?"

"Keep him from doing it."

Gaston looked his men over. There would be twelve of them, all told. Taggart would have fifty. Gaston moved swiftly toward the door.

"Boys, there aren't enough of us," he said sharply. "We couldn't possibly keep 'em from getting fires started. Everything is dry as kindling. If a fire once gets hold here now, everything goes. So we've got to keep 'em from getting started. To do that we've got to have more men. And—you fellows stay right here. I'm going out and try to get 'em."

Tom Pine made to rise, but Gaston was away on the run. He knew that he must act and get results swiftly if at all. And as he ran by a roundabout way for Sam's Place he shook his head at the queer turn of events. For if he was to save Havens Falls he must do it because of his carelessness.

Gaston knew lumberjacks. He knew that the men whose champion he had been and for whom he had exposed the methods of the crooked pugilist, were, for the evening at least, his sworn friends. They would have liked nothing better than to hoist him on their shoulders, parade the town with him, fill him up on all the liquors that the place afforded. Could he halt them in their wild career of the evening and turn their hero-worship to serious ends?

He approached Sam's Place cautiously, keeping in the dark. Inside the outsiders were holding sway. The saloon-keeper, eager for their patronage now that they had their money back, had helped them kick fighter, gambler and knockout-men into the street, and the place was in their hands.

Gaston waited until one of the older men who first had spoken to him, came out for a moment's air. Him he caught by the arm and drew to one side out of the light.

"My name's McKenzie, boy," insisted the man, "and I'm going to buy you a drink or——"

"All right, McKenzie—but not just now. I need friends."

"Put 'er there!" cried McKenzie, shaking hands. "Now, lead the way."

"I need a lot of friends. This is serious, McKenzie. It's life or death for me—and possibly some men and women and children."

McKenzie sobered immediately.

"There's forty men in our crew," he said. "After that fight we're with you to a man."

"Well, for God's sake, McKenzie, round 'em up! Tell 'em it's against that gang. If they're white men tell 'em this is the time to show it. Pass the word on the quiet, and get 'em up to the big store—Hale's store—as soon as you can. And you can promise them a fight that will make anything they've ever been in look foolish. Do this now, if you want to square up for that fight."

" 'Nough said. I was their foreman all Winter. I'll have 'em there in a hurry, or I'm a Swede."

Gaston hurried back to the store. Three more scared-looking but determined men had joined the crowd, so there now were fifteen decent citizens to oppose Taggart's gang. Gaston looked them over and sucked in his lips. He had just seen the river-front swarming with the gangsters. Fifty of them there would be, and they were a tough, hard-bitten crew. Futile to oppose them with these soft-muscled townsmen. If McKenzie's men failed him——

"They're coming!" came the shout from outside.

"Hoop-la!"

The first of McKenzie's crew came tumbling into the room, half a dozen of them, with big Erik in the lead. They swarmed around Gaston Olaf, thrusting the others aside. One man held toward him a roll of bills; two held forth bottles.

"There's your share of the winnings, ol' bear. We chipped in. Take it. We won on you. Take a drink, too."

Gaston drank sparingly from each bottle and accepted the bills. They would have taken it as an insult had he refused.

"Now that's all the booze we'll touch for the present, boys," said he. "And this roll will pay for a little celebration afterward."

Chaffing them, shaking the hands that were outstretched to him, laughing heartily as they smote him affectionately on the back and called him endearing and profane names, he received them as they came tumbling into the store. They were eager to come, eager to shake his hand. The man who had stolen the Taggart drive, and on top of that given them sweet revenge on the slugger, was for this night their hero, their great man of the world. On the other hand, they were in town to celebrate, and this store and this crowd looked like a mighty dry place.

"Where's the excitement, Thorson?" they cried. "Stir 'er up! This looks too much like church for us."

When McKenzie came hurrying in at the head of a dozen men, bringing the number of this crew present up to thirty, Gaston held up his hand for silence.

"Boys," he began seriously, "we want you to join us. We need your help!"

"Who's 'we'? " demanded a voice.

"Don't make no difference who 'tis," snapped McKenzie. "There's a man we owe our shirts to. You listen to him."

"The gang that's been bucking you fellows all evening is fixing to burn this end of town," continued Gaston. He talked swiftly, for he saw that this sober sort of meeting was not to the taste of the joyous lumberjacks, and he feared he might lose his hold. "That gang is Taggart's. You know how they've run things around here. This end of town is where the white people live in this settlement. There are women and babies in these houses, boys; and that gang is fixing to burn 'em out. If we're white men we can't stand by and see that done. We need you boys with us; we aren't enough to protect those women and kids without you. What do you say? Are you white men? Will you stick with us and keep that gang from getting up into this end of town?"

By the silence that followed his speech Gaston knew the men were not won. Like wild, unbroken colts the lumberjacks were balking. Had he gaily placed himself at their head and led them to clean out a saloon, they would have followed without a moment's hesitation. But they balked at this sober appeal for help to guard the houses of towns people against fire.

"Where the —— is the fun in that?" growled one. "Come on; let's go back and get a drink."

"Go ahead!" cried Gaston, flaring angrily. "Go get your drink; you probably wouldn't be any good anyhow."

"Don't tear your shirt, Noisy," spoke McKenzie, his hand on the man's shoulder.

"Stay right here. But lemme tell you, Thorson, this isn't exactly what we were looking for."

"Afraid?"

"Come off, man; don't get on your horse just because we don't fall over ourselves to go with you. There's some of us with women and kids, too; and we get a living for them on Taggart's pay-roll. There'd be no more work in this country for a man who bucked Taggart's gang too hard."

At this Lonergan thrust his square figure beside Gaston.

"Well, well, if it ain't Old Iron Trail!" greeted an old jack. "Speak up, Lonergan; talk's cheap."

"Not the kind of talk I'm going to make," retorted Lonergan. "You know who I am, don't you, boys?"

"Sure. He's the man who grows railroads. Spit it out, old hoss."

Lonergan turned toward McKenzie.

"You said there'd be no work in this country for a man who bucked Taggart too hard. You're wrong. That's just the kind of man who'll be able to find work right here—as much as he wants—at better wages than Taggart pays. In fact, I'm up here to hire men. Next week we're going to start blazing the trail for the line from La Croix up here. I'll need axmen, shovelers, skinners, drivers, spikers, cooks, water-boys, walking-bosses—there'll be two crews. The logging's over for this season. How about a steady job for all Spring and Summer? And the boys who get on my pay-roll will be the ones who help us tonight."

"That goes!" cried McKenzie. "I play with you."

Together with a few of the older men he pressed forward toward Lonergan. But the young fellows, the bulk of the crew, stood still. The idea of providing themselves with further employment was farthest of all from their minds just then. The future might take care of itself; in the meantime, furious, thoughtless excitement was what they craved. This thing was too orderly, too sober for them.

"To —— with a job!" laughed one. "Our money's still good."

"But don't forget who saved it for you," shouted McKenzie.

"To —— ! We ain't playing police for no man's town. Come on, boys; this ain't no fun."

"Then go!" Gaston's voice vibrated with anger, though from the first he had feared just such a turn. "And when we've won this fight alone we'll make you fellows take the tall timber on the run."

They laughed and started for the door; wild colts that would not be haltered. And then they stopped.

"Has anything happened; is any one hurt?"

Gaston and Hale started as one and looked at each other at the sound of the new voice. It was Rose. She came running in; and the men made way for her. Inside the door she paused, panting, her hands on her breast, and looked around.

"Oh!" Her eyes fell on Gaston, and despite the plaster on his face, she gave an exclamation of relief. Then on Hale, and she grew quiet. "I saw the crowd; I was afraid some one had been hurt. But—I'm mistaken?"

"Nobody hurt, Miss Rose." Dr. Sanders tried to say it jauntily, but it was a miserable failure.

Hale looked steadily at the floor; Gaston looked over her head. Neither cared to meet her inquiring eyes. Nor did Lonergan, or Tom, or the doctor. But the lumberjacks of Crew One were staring at her as at a vision, and the light of wickedness went out of many eyes and gave place to something better. They looked at her worshipfully.

She was dressed in a gown of soft whiteness, and her face was alight with the light of a mother-heart, stirred with alarm. To those rough boy-men she was more than merely a dainty and beautiful girl. She was the eternal dream woman which men of their ilk dream of and are prepared to worship.

Their caps came off unconsciously. They grew sober.

Rose looked at the serious faces of the townsmen and tried in vain to catch Gaston's eye.

"Nobody hurt at all," said he airily. "Just a little meeting."

"What is it?" she whispered. "Is anything going—to—happen?"

"No, no!" he said.

"Dick!" she cried to Hale.

"No, no. Everything's all right. You—you had better go home."

She looked around. She couldn't understand. There was something behind the faces which she had learned to know so well. She looked at Lonergan, at Tom Pine, at Dr. Sanders. She turned and looked at the men of Crew One.

"Boys!" she cried to them. "You'll tell me, I know—is anything going to happen?"

There was a moment of silence. Crew One began to smile. Then came the reply, bellowed earnestly from a huge pair of lungs —from the man who had said, "This ain't no fun":

"Not by a da—! Excuse me, lady. I mean, no, sir! No siree, ma'am; there ain't nothing going to happen. No, by Godfrey! Not enough—not enough to fry a six-inch trout at!"

And Crew One shouted as one man to back him up.

"That's right; you bet your bottom boots!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

BATTLE

GASTON, watching the faces of the men, whispered sharply to Hale:

"Take her home. Get her away from here."

He would have given much to accompany her home himself, but his place just then was with Crew One.

Rose's eyes grew soft at the sudden heartfelt tribute which had been given her. She held forth her hands to them in a gesture of fraternity.

"Thank you, boys, thank you!" she murmured. "Yes, Dick; I know. I'll go home."

They watched her go out, watched her, cap in hand, watched till the last glimpse of her was lost in the darkness.

"Well," said Gaston, "you discovered you were white men, after all, did you?"

They came swarming back to him. They were eager to make amends, eager to do something ferocious to prove that they meant what they had said.

"Say, Husk, we didn't understand," they shouted. They held forth their hands. "How the —— could we understand? You know what kind of women we'd been seeing in this burg. By Godfrey! That's a thoroughbred little lady. Come on, Big Fellow, shake hands. We're all white men together now. Now we know what you're standing up for, Thorson. Lead the way. We'll go to —— for you now."

"All right, boys. I knew you were white men if it was put up to you right." Gaston leaned over to Lonergan. "Lonergan, take all your men who've got guns and scatter them in a straight line across the town right here. You've enough that nobody can slip through without being seen. If any Taggart man gets through, fire a shot. They may go into the timber and try to sneak in and fire her from behind. When Hale comes back better have him and a couple others keep moving through this end of town on the lookout. Better go at once."

"Right. Come on, boys."

Lonergan led the posse of citizens out into the night. Tom Pine remained behind.

"All right, Tom," said Gaston. "Put your rifle down. You can go with us. Now, boys, a couple of you slip down and see if the gang is bunched up any place."

Two youngsters ran out eagerly. They were back in ten minutes, their number increased to a dozen by members of Crew One whom they had picked up.

"They're just leaving McCarthy's place," was the report. "They're coming this way."

"Fine!" cried Gaston. "Boys, I promised you a fight. Roll up your sleeves and spit on your hands. We've got to clean up that gang tonight, and the way to lick a man is to get right at him."

In two great leaps he was at the door.

"Can we handle 'em?" he cried.

"Let us at 'em!"

"Then come a-running!" yelled Gaston, and on the dead run he led his men out of the store, and straight at the black mass which was coming up the street.

Taggart's gang stopped suddenly at the line which Gaston had drawn across the street. They stopped in surprise.

They had come on Taggart's orders, expecting to find a dozen townsmen in Hale's store. Half a dozen carried shotguns. Their plan was to trap the men in the store, hold them helpless at gun-muzzles and fire the town at their leisure. They had even come prepared to shoot and shoot quickly at any movement of weapons on the part of their opponents.

But what they found was considerably different from what they had expected.

Down the street at them came hurtling a crowd of yelling men as large as their own. With Gaston at their head, with their biggest men at his sides, Crew One just then was terrible to behold.

Gaston had thrown off all self-restraint.

For the time he had gone berserk, throwing himself headlong at the enemy, thinking not and caring not that they might be armed, eager only to come to grips, confident that nothing could stop his rush.

His fury had communicated itself to his followers. Thoughts of danger, impulses of fear were for the time being non-existent for them. Shotguns, eh? All right; a few of them might go down; but they would follow the big fellow through that crowd and back again, trampling the guts out of 'em, if they never did anything else in the world.

The gunmen hesitated. Their only chance was to have shot instantly, without hesitation, as at a leaping lynx. Ere they could think they were lost.

Gaston knocked up the first gun and struck the gang like a maddened bull, his men at his side. In a flash the gunmen were down, their weapons gone.

"Fight! —— you, fight!"

Taggart's voice rose from the rear, the roar of a drunken animal.

"Fight! —— you, fight!" echoed Gaston mockingly.

THE gang stiffened at Taggart's command. The two sides met with a thud. Groans followed; curses and screams drowned the sound of blows. Over it all rose Gaston's laughter.

"Come on, boys — right through 'em! We'll get Devil Dave himself."

A few knives flashed among the gangsters. The glint of steel drove the lumberjacks mad. They were not to be stopped. For a minute, possibly, Taggart's men held. Then with a shout Gaston broke through with a dozen men; and the fight was won.

"Clean 'em! Hold 'em, boys! Don't let 'em run!"

Crew One was just beginning to fight. Gaston and his dozen saw that Taggart had disappeared, and threw themselves back on the gang.

"That's the stuff, boys. Don't let 'em run."

But the gang, suddenly feeling itself surrounded, broke away. They began to run to both sides of the street.

"Don't let 'em get away!" rose the cry. "They used knives. Hold 'em back."

The fight became a rout. The gangsters ran in all directions. After them went the lumber-jacks.

The battle spread to the timber on either side of town. It raged steadily down toward the red-lights. It swept into the saloons and out again. Gaston led wherever a group of the gangsters made a stand. In his hand he carried as a bludgeon the barrels of a shotgun—the stock he had smashed on a gunman's head—and at the sight of him the gangsters turned and ran.

"Shoot him, shoot that ——!" they cried.

But nobody found time to shoot. It was a rush that would not be stayed. The denkeepers hastily locked and barred their doors and Taggart's men found hiding-places denied them. Down through the river-front swept the pursuit. It ended at the darkness along the river, and Gaston and his men paused and drew breath. There was no one left for them to fight.

"Hoop-la!" The lumberjacks danced jigs and shouted. "Bring on your tigers; we eat 'em alive."

His face alight with triumph, Gaston turned to look back. His jaw fell in horror.

"Good God, boys! Look! They've done it after all."

Up the street, in the upper part of town, a sweep of flame was rushing toward the sky. In the madness of the fight no man of them had turned to note what was going on behind them. Now the whole settlement was lurid under the rapidly rising wall of flame, and the roar and crackle of it reached even down to the river.

"Good God! That must be Hale's store." Gaston's voice was a hoarse whisper. "And if it is the whole street'll go."

He started back toward the flames on a run, followed by his men.

It was not Hale's store that was burning, but the building next to it. This was used as a livery-barn, and stood wall to wall with Hale's building. The barn already was a furnace, too hot to approach. From its dry shingle roof flakes of flame were flying about.

Thus far Hale's building, larger and higher than the barn, was serving as a bulwark, shielding the rest of the settlement from the flying embers. If the store went the way of the barn, it would fire the rest of the street. Olson's Hotel, with tar paper on the walls, stood directly across the street from it; Dr. Sanders's little office was at its side.

From these points the flames could reach out and touch the other buildings, each of which, built of pine and tinder-dry, was like kindling awaiting the match. Nothing is as helpless as a new woods-town when a fire starts in dry weather. Usually there is but one thing to do—move out and watch it burn.

Dr. Sanders was bending over a man of Crew One who lay in the street when Gaston arrived before the burning building.

"Well, Big Fellow, Taggart stole a march when you were rushing his gang," he greeted. "He and Indian Charley sneaked around back of the barn at the height of the mêlée. Had a can of oil and threw it on the hay. This boy, here, saw 'em and jumped 'em just as Taggart struck a match. They didn't quite kill him, but the Indian gave him a little steel between the ribs all right. The barn was one flame in two minutes."

Under Hale's direction men were carrying cases of dynamite from the store to a safe place in the woods. Other men were salvaging the stock while some were climbing to the roof to beat out the flames as they fell. The heat from the burning barn prevented any attempt at working on it.

Hale came out and sized up the situation carefully.

"We've got to start a water line," shouted Gaston. "If we get buckets enough we can wet your building down and save it."

Hale suddenly looked up at his roof. He shook his head.

"Can't do it," he said. "Look."

The roof and the side wall nearest the barn had caught. The shingles were beginning to burn, and dabs of flame began to fall from them.

"Ladders! Get some ladders!" cried Gaston. "It isn't too late yet. "We've got men enough here to save her."

A burning shingle, spewed upward by the force of the flames, floated through the darkness above them and landed gracefully on the stoop of Olson's Hotel.

"You see? Too late," said Hale. He looked long at the big, stanch building in which was a good share of all he possessed, and once more shook his head. "We haven't even got time to get the stock out. Bill," he called quietly to one of his men, "go out and bring back one case of the dynamite, will you?"

"Man!" cried Gaston. "Don't do that yet. Let's try first——"

A second flaming shingle sailed high over the street, dropped, and was stamped out beside the papered wall of the hotel.

"I wouldn't have those poor women burned out just to try to save my store, Thorson. What do you think would happen if my roof began to flame?"

Gaston made no reply.

"It's the only thing to do," said Hale.

Gaston nodded his head silently. The man had returned bearing a heavy box of explosive.

"Clear out, boys," cried Hale. "Get away out of danger. "We've got to blow her up."

A groan and a sigh of relief came from the crowd. They regretted the destruction of the building and yet they realized that by it the town would be saved.

"Fill up your buckets. Scatter yourselves around ready to put out flying brands. And get out of the way when the shot comes."

The crowd drew back until Hale, Gaston and Tom Pine stood alone before the burning building.

"All right; no use delaying it," said Hale, and the three men moved to their work.

Gaston and Tom Pine salvaged stock after the charges had been laid and the fuses lighted. At the last moment they rushed out with armfuls of goods to join Hale, who had sought shelter behind the hotel.

"There she goes!" groaned Tom Pine as the building rose in the air at the explosion.

Gaston vented a curse from the bottom of his chest. The store had fallen together like a house of cards. The barn fell with it, and there remained of it only a low pile of jumbled lumber, which burned without offering any danger to the other buildings of the town.

Hale wiped his lips with his fingers.

"Well," he said steadily, "we did a good job of that."

A small form in white came running toward them. It was Rose.

"Oh, Dick! Your store—how did it happen?"

"There was dynamite in it—it just blew up," replied Hale.

Her eyes fell on Gaston. Even in the half-darkness he saw the light that leapt into them, but he looked away, as if it was something he had no right to see.

"Oh, Gaston! I've heard how you saved us——"

"Don't," he cried hoarsely. "There's the man who did it—Hale. His store didn't just blow up. He blew it up himself, when there might have been a chance to save it, because he was too big a man to risk others' property to save his own."

And he hurried back to where men with buckets were splashing the fringes of the dying fire.

CHAPTER XXXIV

GASTON BUYS STORE CLOTHES

OF ALL the wild nights that Havens Falls had known, that was the wildest. For when Crew One calmed down sufficiently to count noses, it found that three more of its members had suffered knife-wounds fully as serious as those of the man who had tried to prevent Taggart from firing the barn.

Only one result could follow this discovery. The lumberjacks went on the war-path for revenge. Nothing could stop them. Gaston knew the breed too well to try. Before the fire had burned down to embers they were back on the river front, red-eyed with hate and fury, roaring their intentions to revenge the boys who had been stabbed.

"Where's Devil Dave? Where's that—— Indian?" they demanded. "We'll show 'em it's dangerous to knife boys from Camp One."

Naturally, neither Taggart nor the Indian was to be found. The jacks began hunting for other victims. These, likewise, were hard to find.

Most of the gang had gone into hiding. Such as had the hardihood to remain in the saloons also had the cunning to conceal the fact that they had taken any share in the struggle. At rare intervals one of them was recognized, then there was a beating and a scurry, and only the strength of arm of the cooler men prevented a lynching.

Soon the river-front was cleared of every one who might be considered a fair object for vengeance. The tension lessened. Men began to laugh and slap one another on the back. The fighting was over; now to celebrate it. Crew One rushed up to the bars and set in to get truly good and drunk.

A few of the older men, McKenzie leading them, held back. They even sought to urge moderation upon the others. As well seek to whistle down a storm. McKenzie and his kind, seeing the uselessness of remonstrance, went up to the hotel and went to bed, while the victorious lumberjacks, freed of all restraint, proceeded to make the night terrible. They drank like madmen; they howled like the bob-cats and wolves of the forest, and they danced.

Gradually these effervescences ceased. The dancing and shouting ceased; the affair degenerated into a frightful drinking contest. They did not move from the bars. Standing stiffly, leaning lazily, or hanging on with both hands, they stayed by the rude counters, drinking as often as a glass was set before them. Presently the weaker ones began to fall away; the floor became littered with them; they lay outside sleeping. The terrible liquor of the river-front laid most of them low, but when daylight appeared it found a few, stiff-eyed and sleepy, hanging on to a bar with one hand while with the other they carried liquor to their already burnt-out throats.

In the upper part of town there was peace and quiet, though few slept. Gaston organized the men in watches, and himself kept circling the town all night. With the woods full of gangsters there was constant danger that one of them would attempt to sneak forth and start a new fire. It was even possible that Taggart might round them up and make another rush.

When daylight appeared it found Gaston swinging briskly around on the patrol which had occupied him throughout the night. A feeling of bitterness and defeat came to him as the rising sun revealed the smoking ruins of Hale's store and the barn.

The charred timbers seemed to grin at him, reminding him that, in spite of the overwhelming support of Crew One, Taggart had managed to make good a small part of his threat.

"I broke up the gang, but I didn't get the old man," mused Gaston. "Devil Dave is still fighting, and there'll be more of this to come."

The store was a total loss. Of the large, diversified stock which had filled it, a scant tenth, possibly, had been saved. As Gaston contemplated what was left, he forgot Taggart and a thrill ran through him at the memory of Hale's splendid action in the crisis.

"He's a man," he said aloud. "Yep; he's a real man."

He laughed swiftly as he considered how Taggart's coup had failed, after all.

"Taggart set out to hurt Hale by burning him out. He burned his store, all right, but he didn't hurt him. Not much! He gave him a chance to show what was in him. And he's such a quiet, modest little fellow you'd never suspect him of being that big unless he had a chance like this. Now he's had his chance. Everybody knows what he's made of. People'll be talking of this for years to come. They'll look up to Hale, and he deserves it. He'll be one of the biggest men around here, which he is. Ha! And Taggart gave him his chance. The laugh's on Taggart, after all."

Thus mused Gaston as, in the first rays of the rising sun, he marched up and down the street. He had seen a fellow-man put to the test and meet the test in glorious fashion, and he was glowing with appreciation.

His own actions of the night he sincerely considered as nothing in comparison. He had merely led in a terrific fight, and he was one of those who begin to hear sweet music instead of the voice of fear at the approach of trouble. He considered that he deserved no credit. Had he been completely successful against Taggart he might have been inclined to strut a little. But he had not been that, quite. The blackened timbers were reminders that Taggart was not defeated.

"And there'll be no end of this trouble till the old man himself is licked."

His march had led him to beyond the post-office at this moment. He stopped and looked around.

The rays of the morning sun, topping the eastern hills, was lighting up the front of the Havens home, directly before him. Gaston smiled. The house was very pretty to his eyes in the morning light. Apparently its occupants were sleeping soundly. He thought of Rose as he had left her with Hale last night, and he was glad he had left them and had told the truth about Hale's store. The better man must win. It must be a fair game. If Hale was the man for her, all right.

He recalled the look she had given him. Her face, upturned to him, seemed to be before him. He grew thoughtful. Could he make her happy, a woman like her? Was he the man for her?

He looked down at himself and felt abashed. His shirt was torn into strips, and through openings were to be seen cuts and bruises. He looked at his hands; his knuckles were raw, and his right thumb was swollen and discolored. There was blood on his red sash and buckskin trousers. No; he was scarcely the sort of specimen to go wooing a girl like Rose.

Gaston waited until smoke began to appear from chimneys and the town began to stir. Then he went to the house of the owner of the settlement's clothing store and dragged him forth.

"Hello!" cried the man. "Just in time for breakfast."

"Thanks. Don't want any breakfast," retorted Gaston. "Come with me to your store. I want a new outfit."

"Something like what you've got on, I s'pose?" said the merchant, when they reached the store.

"No, siree, pop!" was the emphatic reply. "Nothing at all like what I've got on. I want—I want some regular store clothes."

There was difficulty in fitting him. His huge shoulders cracked wide open the first coat he tried on. At last an outfit was assembled. He also purchased a shaving equipment and towels.

"Now you'll come back and have breakfast with us?" insisted the storekeeper.

Gaston excused himself. He had something else to do.

With his new clothing under his arm, he slipped out of town and went down the river till he found a deep, clear pool. The sun was tinting the stream, and in the pool the water was like a mirror. Kneeling on the bank, Gaston leaned over and studied his reflection in the water. He grinned at what he saw.

"You certainly are hard-looking this morning, boy," he chuckled, "but so long as you didn't get your eyes blacked you can fix yourself up."

With the pool as his mirror he shaved carefully. Next he stripped and stood poised for an instant in the sunlight, a figure for a sculptor to marvel at.

Into the ice-cold water he dove with scarcely a splash, and when he came leaping out to rub himself down he was rosy. He dressed himself in new apparel from feet to head and stretched himself gingerly, feeling cramped and confined at every joint.

He was now arrayed in a sober suit of blue, a soft, white shirt with a loose collar, solid leather shoes, and a soft, black hat. The coat pinched him under the arms and, rubbers and moccasins being his accustomed footwear, the shoes felt stiff and heavy on his feet.

With a sigh he tossed his old, torn shirt out into the current and watched it float down-stream. The buckskin trousers, sash, cap and rubber "high-tops" were about to follow, but he checked himself. When he presented himself at the room which he and Tom had taken at the hotel, these articles were under his arm.

Tom looked up at his entrance and laughed uproariously.

"What in Sam Hill, Gaston Olaf? You—you got religion?"

"Oh, no," said Gaston, tossing his old clothes into a corner, "I just wanted to find out how town clothes feel."

"Well, how about it; how do they feel?"

"Oh," with a tug at his collar, "I suppose a man can get used to anything."

CHAPTER XXXV

A QUIET SUNDAY

AFTER the turbulent Saturday night, Sunday came quiet and peaceful, the calm succeeding the storm. It was the first orderly Sunday in the history of Havens Falls. True, a few of the celebrating lumberjacks upon awakening sought the bars and attempted to resuscitate the corpse of last night's orgy, but the attempt fell flat.

Most of the men, in their own words, had "got enough to last." Some staggered up to the hotel to sleep off the ravages of their celebration; others sought shelter in the woods for the same purpose.

A pall hung over the river-front. The bars were nearly deserted. Where a group was assembled there was no noise. Something new had come to the Settlement which made itself felt even in the foulest corner of the worst den in the front—law and order, civilization.

In a vague, stupid sort of way the gangsters realized the coming of these new forces. That crude line, drawn by Gaston's foot across the street, was like a wall unto them. They scowled and cursed, but they made no more ebullient statements that the town was theirs, to do with as they pleased. They had read the writing on the wall and were troubled.

Taggart and Indian Charley had disappeared immediately after firing the barn.

"He looked like he needed a sleep," chuckled Tom Pine. "When he's slept the liquor out of his head he'll probably come back."

"Yes," said Gaston, "he'll come back sure."

For the present, however, there was nothing to cast a shadow over Havens Falls. The day was a warm, sunny day in Spring; the world was covered with new green things; hundreds of birds sang in the trees; and it was Sunday.

True, there were the ruins of Hale's store and the barn to remind of what had taken place the night before. But Havens Falls was young, and recovered rapidly, and by noon those same ruins were things to joke over while wondering if the trout wouldn't soon begin biting. There were picnic parties up on the big hill, and rowing parties up the river.

Dr. Sanders and Hulda paddled downstream in a birch-bark canoe. When they returned, Hulda had promised that if he would stop drinking so much whisky she would marry him as soon as they could get a house. It was Hale's canoe that they paddled in. Hale had no time to go canoeing that Sunday. He and Lonergan were busy hiring men and planning to build up a new store.

In the middle of the bright afternoon Gaston gave way to the desire that had tugged at his heart all morning, and sought out Rose. He found her starting up the hill toward the picnic party, and she stood stock still and marveled at the change in his attire.

"Well," he laughed, "do I look civilized?"

"Yes," she said seriously, and paused.

"Even if I don't act that way, yet?" he suggested.

"No. I wasn't going to say that," was her grave reply. "I have heard the men talking about you. They say that the only reason why you were able to save the town was that—that you had acted so—so daringly——"

"Recklessly!" he interposed.

"Early in the evening. It isn't for me to judge you. Naturally I thought it was strange for you to do such a thing immediately after you had promised me that you'd be careful. But men say it was fine and big—your fighting; that you are a great man. I suppose you are a judge of what was necessary to save the town. You did save us, anyhow, I know," she concluded, "and—and you do look civilized now."

"I am glad of that," he said gravely. "I want to be civilized. I want to settle down. But men are wrong when they say that fighting was fine and big. It wasn't. It was fool recklessness. It turned out lucky, though, for the town, and the people, and everything about it, and I'm glad of that."

They were half-way up the ridge now, and they stopped and looked back. Below them the town and its environs lay like a green map. There lay the Settlement on its flat in the river bend, a peerless town-site. Through it curved the rushing La Croix, lending virility and force to the scene.

On all hands stretched the fat farming land, waiting only the plow of the breaker. The birch gleamed white through the green note of Spring. It was a good country; it fairly smiled in the warm afternoon sunlight.

"Look at it!" cried Gaston, his out-door senses thrilled by the scene. "Isn't it enough to make a man want to throw off his coat and dig in to help make it fit for folks to live in? Look at that flat along the river—miles and miles of it! Think of what a lot of young couples can find homes and farms on that! Look at the power in that river! Can't you see mills and wood-factories along it?

"And there's the little town. When I look at it, I don't see those little shacks down there; I see a street with brick buildings — stores, banks, everything; and churches, and schools, and fine homes. Down there's where the depot will be, and the trains'll come swinging around that hog-back yonder. And preachers, and school-teachers, and all those kind of people will come riding in on the train, and the folks who marry will have a chance to educate their kids right here. It's a dream, I know, but this dream certainly is coming true."

She cried out, clapping her hands in delight at the picture he had drawn.

"Oh, Gaston! To think there's all that in you!"

He turned swiftly, a hungry look at the corners of his mouth.

"Rose—Rose, there's many sorts of things in me. More than I know myself, perhaps. Most of what's come out so far has been the rough, wild part——"

"No, sir! Don't you say that. I owe you too much to permit it. It's been fine—much of it."

"Well, if there is anything fine in me, and if it has shown, it's been because of——"

He checked himself suddenly. He looked away, out over the town.

"Rose," he resumed quietly, "every man —every white man—wants the fine in him to come out, if it's in him. I want it. I don't know whether it's there or not. Sometimes I'm afraid it's not. A man will be what his nature makes him. But—Rose," he broke off suddenly, "are you engaged to Hale?"

"No." She was cruelly agitated. "He is my best friend."

"He's a brick! But—nothing else?"

"No."

He tore the top off a pine-bush and crushed it in his hands.

"Rose, tell me honestly," he pleaded frankly, "what do you think of me?"

"What I—think of you?" She grasped his arm, drawing him around so he must meet her eyes. "How can you ask me that, when you've done what you have for me?"

"No, no! Not that. You know what I mean."

Slowly she let go of his arm, and slowly her eyes went to the ground.

"Oh, Gaston, Gaston!" she stammered. "You charm me, you thrill me. You seem to warm me and waken me when you come near me, like the morning sun, or like a fresh south wind in Spring. Yes, you're like that. Your smile is like the sun to me, really. There's something in me that leaps up and makes me want to—to go to you. But there's something about you that — that frightens me, too. I don't know what it is. Oh, please, please, let's go on up to the others."

"You bet," he said, and promptly began to help her up the hill toward the picnic party. "But—have I got a chance?"

She did not reply. Her eyes rose and met his and fell again. And he knew that he could win her; that if he persisted she would come to love him; that he could make her his own.

CHAPTER XXXVI

SETTLING DOWN

FROM that moment he gravely set to work to make himself fit to have the right to claim her. He realized that he had a difficult task before him. There was Hale, and Hale was in love with her, and would make her the kind of husband she deserved.

She would marry Hale, Gaston knew, if it were not for himself. And she would be happy with Hale, too. So he had no right to think of winning her unless he could make sure that he would be as good a husband as Hale. That was his task now: to be the kind of a man who was fit to marry Rose Havens. It would be a hard pull; but he had done many hard things, and his confidence in himself was unbounded. So he set to work.

His first move was to call on Jack McCarthy in the latter's place that evening. He had selected McCarthy as the strong man of the river-front. McCarthy greeted him quietly and thrust forth a bottle and two glasses. Gaston pushed them back.

"I'll have a little water, Jack."

Without a word McCarthy filled two glasses with water.

"Here's how?" said he. "Now—shoot."

"For a start," began Gaston, "you know I've got no hard feelings against you. You're in this business, and that's all right. But I've been elected to keep order in this town, and that's my business. You're the leader down here, and that's why I'm talking to you. The wild days are over in this town. Pin that up over your register and remember it. This gang down here doesn't run Havens Falls any longer. We've got the whip-hand up in the other end of town, and we've decided to make the place decent. We aren't going to interfere with you unless you interfere with us. There's a line up there in the street. You fellows keep this side of it!

"Don't think I'm just talking. It's serious. You fellows might tear loose and lick us once. But we're here to stay. You can pass the word to the gang that their day's over. This is your side of the line; but don't let things get so wild that they spill over on us. If you do, somebody will have to leave town—and we're high man. I'm telling you this to avoid trouble."

McCarthy nodded.

"I've seen it coming," he said. "I'm getting ready to move."

Later that night Gaston took Red-Shirt Murphy a mile down the river road and pointed down-stream.

"Good-by, Murphy," he said. "You've had your day in Havens Falls, but you're leaving now. Don't come back. It wouldn't be healthy. Lynching's too good for a man who'll rob a kid; here's what you deserve— Hike!"

Red Shirt's teeth rattled as Gaston's right foot lifted him in the air. The erstwhile bad man picked himself up hurriedly. Gaston was setting himself for another kick; Murphy put his head down and ran, out of sight, and out of Havens Falls.

Next, Gaston placed the deeds for his own and Tom Pine's timber claim in Lonergan's hands. The railroad man added the land to the holdings of his company. A few days later he returned from La Croix with deeds conveying to the two partners the parcel of land which he had directed Gaston to secure in Havens Falls.

"Now I feel sure of you," said Lonergan, when the last details of the transfer were completed. "You'll stick now."

"What's that?"

"I say you'll stick here now. Was afraid you'd quit us and go wandering. Don't want you to do it. We need you right here. Feel sure of you now; a man usually sticks in the spot where he's got property."

Tom Pine grumbled as he studied the deeds.

"Town property," he growled. "What have I got to do with things like that? A piece of timber-land, that's all right. A man can build his shack and camp on it if he wants to. But I ain't no town real-estater, Gaston Olaf, you know that."

"You can sell out pretty soon and get enough to buy all the timber-land you want," replied Gaston. "This is our chance to make a stake."

Tom thought it over for a while.

"Yep; that's all right for you, Gaston Olaf—to make a stake," he muttered. "But for me, after it's made, what am I going to do with it?"

Nevertheless Tom Pine followed his leader's example, and, apparently, was resolved upon settling down and becoming a permanent resident of Havens Falls. He went to work for Hale, who, backed by Lonergan, was rebuilding the store. Tom worked steadily through the lazy Spring days and drew only such part of his pay as was necessary for his expenses.

"If I had any loose money in my clothes, I'd be apt to want to let 'er roar a little," he explained, "and Gaston Olaf being marshal, 'twouldn't be right of me to do that."

Gaston, finding no immediate call for his services as marshal, went to work on the railroad. Lonergan had started his line from both ends, and Gaston was placed in charge of the clearing crew working out of Havens Falls. He was a very different foreman than the one who had driven Taggart's men so ruthlessly. He worked soberly and steadily.

The line ran out through a forest of birch. At times, when the white trunks of the trees glistened in the warm Spring sun, when the rapidly growing leaves waved lazily in the slight breeze, and a dozen varieties of birds made the woods alive with their songs and plumage, he was moved to leap into the air and shout from sheer joy of living. He didn't do it, however. At such times he thought of what he was working for, and with tightly pressed lips seriously went on with his duties.

There was only one thing to worry him now. Taggart had sobered up and had returned to his office, as cold and masterful apparently as ever. It was his busy season. His drives were behind the booms, and he was occupied with the work of turning the Winter's harvest into money.

Gaston agreed with his associates not to trouble Taggart so long as he did not trouble them. He did not for an instant fancy that Taggart had dropped the feud. He kept his skin whole in those days only by his unflagging vigilance, and by showing Taggart and his men that he was not to be caught off his guard. The strain brought new lines about his mouth. What new deviltry was Taggart planning? When would he show it, and how?

Gaston's natural impulse was to rush to meet Taggart face to face and have it over with, one way or another, in one final clash. He held his peace, however, a trying thing for him to do with an enemy in sight. His natural impulses were under complete control—for the time being.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A STORM BREWING

TAGGART'S old gang had been thoroughly broken up. A few of its members, who had taken only a small part in the memorable night fight, came drifting back, carefully feeling out the ground and ready to flee at the first sign of hostility.

The fight had been taken out of them. Craven at heart, they saw that power in the settlement had passed from Taggart to the decent element, and they sought at once to curry favor with the latter. Here, however, they met rebuffs.

Gaston pointed to the line he had drawn in the street.

"You made your choice that night," he reminded them. "Get back where you belong. Nobody will trust you up here. We won't bother you if you don't bother us, but —you're not wanted."

The leaders of the gang followed Murphy's example and did not return. The gangsters who had come back hung meekly around the river-front, and law and order were undisturbed in Havens Falls.

"Pretty dull, ain't it, Gaston Olaf?" commented Tom Pine one Saturday evening as they sat before the hotel and looked down toward the river-front. " 'Member how it used to be on a Sat'day night, down there? Now—why, you can't scare up enough excitement to start a sweat."

"Don't want to start any excitement," retorted Gaston. "This is just the way we want it, nice, quiet and orderly."

Tom Pine heaved a sigh.

"Yes; but it gets darn good and dull sometimes, you'll admit me that, Gaston Olaf?"

"I'll admit nothing of the sort," was the reply. "This is the way I want things; I've worked to make things this way; don't want any foolish excitement any more. Besides," his eyes lighted up, "there'll be plenty of excitement before long. Taggart isn't going to lay quiet much longer."

"Taggart? Hm, hm. What about Taggart, Big Fellow?"

Dr. Sanders, coming to see Hulda, stopped for a moment's chat. Gaston repeated his remark. The doctor shook his head.

"Hm, hm. Don't agree with you, Gaston. Old Devil Dave is a bear, sure enough, but he isn't exactly mad with the heat. No one man is going to try to buck a whole settlement by himself, and Taggart's gang is gone—busted."

"But the old man isn't," insisted Gaston. "He'll bear a lot of watching yet. The old gang is gone, sure; but there's nothing to keep him from getting another."

The doctor passed on inside, and Tom Pine lighted his pipe and went for a stroll. After a while Gaston rose and went down the street to the river-front.

As he passed McCarthy's he glanced through the open door and stopped in surprise. McCarthy was not in sight. Where he was accustomed to stand on Saturday nights stood a heavy, crop-headed man with the flat face and figure of a Slav. Impelled by curiosity Gaston entered. New bartenders, of the same type as the man in front, were behind the bar. The crowd, likewise, was different, squat, flat-faced foreigners, talking in a strange, guttural tongue.

"Hullo, Boss," greeted Gaston, "where's McCarthy?"

"Gone 'way," was the guttural response. "Dis place mine now."

Gaston recalled what McCarthy had said about getting ready to move.

"You've bought McCarthy out?"

"Yess. An't'ing elsse you want know?"

A snicker ran around the crowd. Gaston, looking at their flat evil faces, saw they were regarding him with sneers. Anger flared up within him. Hot words sprang to his tongue; but he caught himself in time.

"No; that's all," he said patiently and turned to go.

The proprietor followed him to the door.

"I hear 'bout you. You run diss town, hah? By ——! You won' run Jan Ulnick's place. Jan Ulnick, Polska Saloon, see? Dat's wha' diss goin' be. Polish manns goin' work for Bahss Taggar'. See? Bahss tell us all 'bout you. You tink you want to monk' with us, hah? We don' stand dat, see?"

"I see," replied Gaston, and hurried to get himself away before his rage could master him.

He went at once to Lonergan, who was in town, and told what he had discovered. Lonergan had an old Pole in the crew at that end of the line, a man who had been with him for years and whom he could trust. This man he sent to mingle with the crowd at McCarthy's old place and learn all he could. The old man returned within an hour, shaking his head.

"It is Jan Ulnick, the bad saloon-keeper from over on the Iron Range," he reported. "The men with him are bad men, miners who would not work, who are driven out of the mines. Ulnick had a bad place over there. He is driven out by the sheriff, and these men with him. Taggart sends for them. He tells them this is a place they can do as they please in, no sheriff, nobody to stop them—if they do not let the people here bluff them. He tells them the people here are great bluffers, but they are afraid of bad, strong men. Ulnick buys out McCarthy. Taggart promises the rest work. Other bad saloon-keepers and men are coming from the Range. They say nobody had better monkey with them."

Lonergan looked silently at Gaston as the old man finished his story, and Gaston looked back. The railroad man shook his head.

"Our friend Taggart is a great man," said he, "great general, great politician, great organizer—gone wrong."

"I knew he was about due to make a move," said Gaston. "But I never looked for this."

"He couldn't have made a better one, from his point of view," continued Lonergan. "He knows that he could never get another gang of white men around him here. They've all heard of what happened to the old gang. You've busted the old man's grip. He had to get hold of a crew that didn't know what had happened here, and wouldn't understand if they did. These ignorant, pig-faced Hunyaks fill the bill. Taggart is himself again."

"He's a fox and a wolf," admitted Gaston. "We're too strong for him now, though."

Lonergan scratched his head dubiously.

"I dunno about that, Thorson. Of course, Taggart's out for one kind of game, you understand that?"

"The first job he'll set these Hunyaks at is to put me out of business," agreed Gaston quietly.

"Yes. And if they succeed in doing that —well, you know what it will look like: Taggart will be Big Chief again, and God help Havens Falls!"

"That's it. And that's why I'm not going to take any chances."

"What's your program, Thorson?"

"Keep out of their way as much as possible. Leave them alone if they leave us alone. But if they get so bad we can't stand 'em——"

He stopped abruptly with a snap of his teeth and stood looking with flashing eyes toward the river-front.

"Then what?"

Gaston's teeth gleamed white as he smiled.

"Law and order," said he. "Law and order forever!"

Tom Pine heaved a sigh of relief when he heard of the new situation.

"Then there'll be something happening," said he contentedly. "Hunyaks are lambs when they're alone, but wolves when you get 'em in a pack. They'll be trying to run us out. Nacherly, we won't go. There'll be some excitement then. We need it. Things have been mighty dull."

In the next few days it developed that Lonergan's man had reported the situation correctly. One by one the old saloon-keepers of the front sold out, and men of Ulnick's type took their places. The dives and the dance-hall changed hands last of all. There was a complete change in the personnel of the front. The newcomers brought women with them. The river-front was in their hands and under Ulnick's leadership.

Save for this threatening change, Havens Falls would have been gloriously content with itself during those bright days of Spring. It was experiencing the first thrill of a boom, and the optimism of a boom-town was its to a considerable degree.

That a railroad was being built up to the settlement was in itself enough to start the enthusiasm. Settlers began to come in; merchants followed them. The rattle of hammers echoed ceaselessly throughout the warm days. Houses were thrown up swiftly. Lots were staked out and sold, building lots, where a few weeks before rabbits had romped undisturbed.

Plans were made to apply for a city charter, to build a school and a church. Hale's new stock came in by the wagon-load. Had it not been for the new crowd in the river-front the settlement would have whooped with joy.

The river-front grew more threatening day by day. Taggart was discharging all his old men and replacing them with foreigners. These men grew more and more insolent toward the townspeople.

Then one day it became known that Taggart had started drinking again. Nobody was surprised. Having by choice surrounded himself with a swinish crew, he proceeded to sink himself to their level. Gaston knew that the inevitable clash would come before Taggart was over this spree.

"Inevitable, hm, hm, inevitable that he'd do that," commented Dr. Sanders. "Instincts all wrong, you know. Whisky and women; he can't rise above them. The whisky has been getting him, too, this last year. His debauches have been a little, hm, hm, a little too inhuman even for him to stand. Nerves torn to pieces; system crying periodically for excesses, each one worse than the last. He'll go to pieces; had the willies a couple times. Go to pieces sure; likely to do damage when he does."

One quiet evening the doctor, visiting Hulda at the hotel, was sent for to come down to one of the dives. His patient was an unfortunate woman; her thin, miserable arm had been broken above the elbow by a blow. In a corner of the room sat Taggart, holding a broken whisky bottle by the neck, leering insanely, his eyes popping, his head jerking about helplessly.

"Fix her up, Doc; want to teach her 'nother lesson," he sneered. "Teach 'em all lessons. I'm king here—own 'em—body 'n' soul."

Dr. Sanders, the professional instinct uppermost, before he left the place spoke once to Taggart.

"Taggart, as a physician, I must warn you: if you continue this spree any longer you're as good as dead."

"Wrong, Doc; dead wrong," sneered Taggart promptly. "Another man'll die of it; not me. His name's Thorson. I'll show 'im. He's the one who's good as dead."

Gaston tightened his lips as Dr. Sanders told him of this.

"It'll come now; he'll run wild, like a mad dog," said he. "Well, the sooner the better."

Tom Pine likewise grew serious as he heard the doctor repeat Taggart's words.

"That means the old devil's set a trap for you, Gaston Olaf."

"Sure."

"And he's got them Hunyaks with him this time—too many of 'em."

"Sure again."

There was a long silence. Dr. Sanders stroked his beard nervously; Gaston sat looking at the ground. At last Tom Pine rose casually, clearing his throat.

"Guess I'll go for a little walk before turning in," he said, striving to speak carelessly, but his effort betrayed him.

"You've walked enough today," said Gaston, catching him by the arm. "Sit down. Don't you go starting a little war against Taggart by yourself. I've told you that doesn't go any more here."

"It's the easiest way, Gaston Olaf," protested Tom. "He's raving with liquor now.

He'd try to get me on first sight. Then it'd be all over in two shakes of a doe's tail, and those Hunyaks would be easy to handle with the old man gone."

"It doesn't go," repeated Gaston firmly.

"No," agreed Dr. Sanders with a sigh, "it doesn't go. Law and order. Hm, hm. We can't break the law."

There was more silence.

"No use telling anybody what he said about me," said Gaston finally. "It wouldn't do any good, and it might cause some worry."

As they were about to part, Dr. Sanders hung back, tugging at his beard, and with many hm, hm's, indicating that something was on his mind.

"Out with it, Doc," said Gaston. "What's troubling you?"

"Well — hm, hm — you know, I'd like things to run along for the next week or so without any trouble. We're going to get married, the girl and myself, a week from today. She'd feel a lot better, you know, if things went along smooth and safe at this time."

"Well?"

"Hm, hm. I'm pretty sure I know a way out of this without any trouble for the present, Thorson."

"What is it?"

"This: Taggart is going to pieces rapidly. He's sure to be laid up a while at least after this awful spree. He can't do anything then. If the trouble doesn't come while he's on this drunk, it may not come at all. Anyhow it'll be delayed."

"Go on."

"Well, the way his crazy mind is running now, it's only you that he's really after. If you weren't here—if you should go out of town until this spree puts Taggart on his back——"

But Gaston clouded up darkly.

"No, sir!" he snapped. "I left town once on account of Taggart. I won't do it again. Don't ask it. This time one of us is going away for good."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

"WAIT, GASTON!"

GASTON sat alone for a long time after the doctor had gone. So Sanders and Hulda were going to get married. The carefree, sport-loving bachelor had met his fate. In the quiet blue eyes of Hulda he had found something that was more to him than his whisky-bottle, more than his bachelorhood, more than all the wild freedom of the life he hitherto had led.

The doc was going to settle down. He had given up the whisky altogether. Samson no longer ruled in the back room. The doctor had ceased to volunteer his services as referee at every fight that came within his ken. He had substituted sober, professional black for his gaudy waistcoats, and he was building a house for himself and Hulda.

Gaston smiled as he contemplated the change that had come over the doctor in the last few weeks. He was sensible that he had come to regard Sanders in a different light. At first he had merely liked him as a good fellow; now he respected him as a physician and as a man.

So the doctor and Hulda were to marry. And they would settle down in the house they were building. They would have a home. Children would come to them; the doctor would know the sober thrill of holding in his arms his first-born, flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone. As the town grew the doctor's practise would grow. He would be a big man, settled and all that, with his woman at his side.

Lucky doctor! He had found contentment, even happiness. Gaston began to dream. His quick imagination pictured himself in the doctor's place. He saw Rose moving about him—about their home—tripping lightly on her tiny feet, her face alight with joy. Was there anything better in the world than that?

"Whip - er - will; whip-er-will; whip - er-will!" suddenly cried a whippoorwill down by the river.

Startled, Gaston looked in its direction. He saw the river-front, red with lights, heard a sudden shout of drunken song, and his brow clouded.

"Better have that settled before you begin planning," he told himself. "You may not be here to plan after that's over."

To rid himself of these dark thoughts he rose and walked up to where Dr. Sanders was building his new home. To his surprise he saw that the house was less than half finished. It would be impossible at the rate it was going to have it completed by the day set for the wedding.

"Huh! That isn't right," he mused.

"The doc and Hulda ought to have their own house ready to move into!" A gleam of amusement crossed his face. The dark thoughts were forgotten. "Yes, by Jupiter! and they're going to have it, too," he said and went home to bed smiling boyishly.

Next morning he broached his idea to Hale.

"We owe it to the doc," he explained. "He's a good fellow. We'll give 'em a building-bee and have the house all ready for them."

Hale promptly fell in with the idea.

"The store can wait," he said, and turned himself and his builders over to the new project.

Gaston explained to Lonergan why he would leave the crew for a week.

"Sure," said Lonergan. "Need any more men?"

Dr. Sanders rubbed his eyes when he came forth to inspect the progress of his building.

"Hm, hm! What's this, what's this?" he demanded.

Gaston, in the act of lifting a rafter into place, laughed down at him.

"Tom Pine and I want your old shack," he said, "so we've decided to get this one finished for you in a hurry."

"Hm, hm. All right," said the doctor. "Do the same for you some time."

The finishing of the doctor's house became a lark for the whole settlement. Other building stopped for the time being while the builders devoted themselves to the building-"bee." From the rapidly growing structure rose a constant rat-tat-tat of hammers, punctuated by the jests and laughter of the crowd of workers. As they worked they considered the situation seriously.

"The doc was fig'ring on a quiet wedding, but that won't do," said one enthusiast. "Now that we've started on it we might's well do it up brown. Let's make it a holiday, and everybody lay off and give 'em a send-off that'll do the town proud."

The idea was greeted with acclamation. It was the first wedding of importance in the settlement, and the pioneers determined to make it a memorable event. The work on the house went on with increased speed.

Two days before the day set for the wedding Gaston climbed to the peak of the roof and fastened a small flag, donated by Postmaster Perkins, to the tin chimney. The crowd gathered before the house, comprising every man, woman and child of the respectable portion of Havens Falls, waved hats and handkerchiefs and cheered lustily. The house was finished and ready for the doctor and Hulda to occupy.

As Gaston came clambering down from the roof he met Rose leading a corps of women into the building. Some carried brooms, others carried curtains, plants, carpet pieces and other articles of furniture and decoration.

"Your job is done here, Mr. Man," she said gaily. "Now the ladies come on the scene to beautify the labor of men's hands."

"That's what they always do," he replied. "Men can't do anything but put up the bare walls; it's you women who make a home out of a place."

"Of course. But a woman can't make a home unless there's a man to do the building. You see, we're dependent on each other."

"Yes. And each has got to be dependable." He looked the house over. "The doctor and Hulda will be happy here, all right; they're both the dependable kind."

Rose laughed, a trifle mischievously.

"Certainly they'll be happy. Hulda's started mothering him already, and the doctor is the kind of man who needs and likes to be mothered. Oh, yes; they'll be happy. Hulda'll be the boss in a month; and Dr. Sanders knows it and is glad of it."

Gaston gazed at her, wide-eyed with admiration.

"That's so. I can see it, now that you've spoken of it. How did you know it? Can you read all men like that?"

"No." She grew serious. "No, some men a woman can't read at all. It's all plain in the doctor's case; he—he's just a nice, ordinary man."

"Some men aren't—nice and ordinary?"

"Aren't ordinary," she corrected. "They—oh, I don't know. Gaston," she said, looking straight at him, "I wonder if I will ever know you. You're so full of surprises. One day I think of you as fierce—no, not that—as restless and reckless. Sort of a wild, strange spirit. And then you do something sweet and pretty, like getting this house finished, so they'll have their own home to move into when they're married. What a jolly idea that was!"

"I like to see folks have homes," he said lamely.

"Yes. I know you do."

"I want a home of my own," he whispered hoarsely.

She looked at him tenderly for a moment.

"Gaston," she said softly, "are you sure that you do? Are you sure that you want that more than—your freedom? For you know—you know you can not have them both."

"I am sure—" he began, but checked himself. He hesitated, his eyes on the ground. "If I was sure, Rose——"

"But you're not, Gaston!" she whispered haltingly. "You're not! I can see it. You're not sure yet; you know you're not."

Within him he felt an all but uncontrollable impulse to reply firmly that, yes, he was sure. The impulse sprang from the very roots of his being. It cried out to him to swear that he was sure, to dominate her, to make her believe it was so, to take her for his own.

His lips even opened to utter the words. He trembled, and for an instant his blue eyes were clouded with the agony of his struggle. The selfishness of the young male rose strong in him. He wanted her so much, and, whispered impulse, it would be so easy to convince her that he was sure; it would even be easy to convince himself.

His lips were parted; the words came rushing to his tongue; and then he clicked his jaws together and threw up his head. His eyes were clear again now, and something finer than yearning, something finer even than the light of love itself, was gleaming in the deep blue of them.

"Rose—" his voice was normal and steady again—"I don't know whether I am sure."

She nodded gravely.

"I knew you weren't sure, Gaston. I could feel it."

"When I am sure, do you think you could feel that, too?"

Again she nodded.

"If ever you are sure, I think I would feel that, too."

" 'If'? Then you don't think——"

She turned away without reply.

"If I do come to know that I'm sure," he persisted, "and you feel it, what then?"

She turned back and looked at him for a long time.

"Gaston," she said, "I like you, and I like Dick Hale. But you are trying to make me more than like you. Oh, Gaston! You mustn't talk to me like this unless you become sure of yourself."

"Forgive me," he whispered penitently. "I'll never speak another word of it—unless I'm sure I have the right."

She held out her hand impulsively.

"Shake!" she said, smiling. "Now I must get to work."

As she turned to join the other women, Hale came up, his arms filled with rolls of wall-paper. Rose eagerly tore open a roll to look at the pattern.

"Oh, Dick!" she cried. "What perfect taste you've got! Such a dainty blue, and those tiny flowers! Won't it make their sitting-room perfectly darling!"

They went inside, Rose fairly skipping with eagerness while Hale smiled patiently. Gaston, looking after them, smiled also; but he only did so because it was natural for him to smile when he was hit hard.

"Come on, Thorson," called a man from behind the house, and Gaston roused himself. "Where are we going to build the dance floor?"

That was another idea which the settlement had conceived to aid in celebrating the wedding. They were going to have a dance, of course. What would a wedding be without a dance? An orchestra was to be brought up from La Croix, not merely a couple of fiddlers, but a real orchestra, including horns and a trap-drummer.

It would be a celebration to attract such a crowd as never yet had been known north of La Croix. Would there be room for everybody to dance in the doctor's new house? Obviously there would not be. Thus it was resolved to splurge and lay down an outdoor dancing-floor which would send the fame of Havens Falls flying broadcast throughout the woods.

The men turned from the building of the house to the laying of the floor. While some put down the boards others went into the swamp and cut a wagon-load of small evergreen trees. These were fastened upright around the floor, enclosing it in four odorous green walls.

To further embellish the scene, Postmaster Perkins brought forth a roll of old bunting. The boys cheered. It reminded them of the Fourth of July.

On the night before the wedding it was all complete. The house was ready for occupancy; the orchestra was in town; the floor was in shape. Hale had gone to La

Croix to drive the minister up in the morning, and it awaited only the morning for the celebration to begin.

"Well," said Gaston, as he and Tom Pine quit work that evening, "I'm surprised they let us get that done without a hitch."

Tom whistled.

"You mean those Hunyaks and Taggart? You been thinking about them, too?"

"I couldn't hardly forget them, could I? They've been noisy enough every night. They've left us strictly alone, though, and that looks bad. Taggart must have been holding 'em in, though he's plumb crazy from drinking. If he has, it's only been for one thing."

"Tomorrow, you mean, Gaston Olaf?"

"Yes, it would be like the old devil to save his worst stroke for a day like tomorrow."

Tom Pine grew thoughtful. He retired early to his room. From the window of the room he could look down the river-front from end to end.

Tom carefully oiled his rifle and Gaston's, tried levers and triggers, loaded the magazines to the brim, and went to bed. In the morning he complained of excruciating pains in his left leg, alleging that he had strained it the day before. Besides, his rheumatism always bothered him that time of the year, he said. It would be necessary, he declared, for him to keep to his bed most of the day, lest the trouble become aggravated.

Gaston laughed, knowing well Tom's dislike for conventional festivities and recognizing a subterfuge. But Tom had moved his bed so he could lie on it and look out of the window upon the river-front.

CHAPTER XXXIX

TAGGART STRIKES

THE day of the wedding dawned clear, cool and sunny. A slight breeze, blowing from the woods toward the river, carried over the town the many fresh odors of northern woods in the full bloom of early Summer. There was the odor of balsam in the air, and of budding tamaracks and spruce.

Up from the swamp came the smell of cowslips and yellow-headed water-lilies, while from the sunny sides of the surrounding hills there came drifting down the gentle odor of dying woods violets, which in spots covered the ground like a carpet. Up above, against the sky, tiny specks of white clouds shared with a pair of lazily soaring hawks in the vast blue dome of the heavens. The birds of the forest, with no clatter of hammering to alarm them, drew near, and in the stillness of the morning their clear notes ringed the settlement around with song. It was a day when the whole world seemed glad and filled with young life—a day fit for the wedding of a Hulda.

The people of the settlement, and their visitors, appeared early, dressed for the occasion. Postmaster Perkins was solemnly gorgeous in ancient swallow-tailed coat, high leather boots, hickory shirt and wide-brimmed G. A. R. hat. Lonergan even went further—he wore a new suit of black, a stiff shirt *and* collar!

From these extremes of fashion the apparel of the men ranged to the fringed buckskin shirts and trousers of the trappers who had come in from the woods for the occasion. Most of the women and girls managed to display something new in the way of dress, sash or ribbon. Some of the girls were spick-and-span in white dresses with wide blue sashes. A few Indians waddled stolidly about in blankets and moccasins.

The wedding was set for "high noon," as the editor at La Croix wrote in his next week's issue. After the ceremony, dinner was to be served, and then the dancing was to begin.

In the private recesses of Olson's Hotel, Rose and other women had Hulda prepared for the event an hour before the time set. It was with difficulty that Hulda was restrained from doing her share of the work about the hotel that morning. Only after she saw that neighbors were efficiently assisting her mother, did she agree to "sit like a loafer," as she expressed it.

When fully dressed for her wedding Hulda's appearance threw her attendants into ecstasies of delight. Of all the women present she was the only one serene and undisturbed. Even in stiffly starched white, and laced to within an inch of her life, the magnificent freedom of her body was untrammelled. The red and cream of her complexion was a trifle heightened by excitement; her steady blue eyes were serene with happiness and triumph; down her back two thick braids of yellow-golden hair fell below her waist. At times she blushed slightly.

In the doctor's bachelor quarters Dr. Sanders, in the hands of Gaston and Lonergan, sat fully dressed, waiting for the noon hour with all the serenity and composure of a man about to be hanged for stealing sheep. To further his comfort his two companions assured him that the agony of waiting was nothing compared to what he would experience during the ceremony.

"Wait until you get up there before the minister with everybody looking at you," encouraged Gaston. "Then you'll have something to get cold sweats about."

The doctor retorted with an old shoe, which Gaston ducked laughingly.

Lonergan looked at his watch.

"Hello! Ten minutes after eleven. Hale and the preacher are about due."

"Maybe they'll be late; maybe something's happened; maybe they can't come." The doctor grasped at the straws eagerly.

"Oh, no," Gaston assured him. "Nothing's happened. Hale will be here on time. You can't escape. A few minutes more now and we'll be leading you out where the crowd can get one last, fond look at you."

Dr. Sanders swung to the window, glanced out and retreated.

"Whew! Everybody in town's ready and waiting. Regular mob. Hm, hm. You'd think they'd never seen a wedding the way they're waiting—think it was a show."

"It is," chuckled Gaston. "Take my word for it, Doc, you'll be a show all by yourself."

"It's an almighty quiet crowd," said Lonergan speculatively. "The boys are staying away from the saloons."

"They all like doc and respect the trouble he's going through."

"Quiet down in the river-front, too. Wonder if they're doing that because there's a little decency left in 'em?"

"What time is it?" cried the doctor petulantly. "Darn it! Why doesn't Hale show up? Said he'd be here about eleven, didn't he? If he's coming, why doesn't he come and have it over with?"

A number of women passed the office, going toward the new house.

"They're beginning to assemble in your honor, Doc," laughed Gaston. "Your time draws nigh. All we're waiting for now is the preacher."

"Maybe he won't come," insisted the doctor hopefully. "Maybe we'll have to put it off."

They sat in silence for a while. Again Lonergan looked at his watch.

"Twenty minutes after eleven," he said. "They'll be here now, or something's happened."

Gaston and the railroad builder stepped outside and looked down the street. The road from La Croix ran along the river; Hale and the minister would have to drive through the river-front when they came.

"Not in sight yet," said Lonergan.

"It's a warm morning for fast driving," said Gaston. "Hale's a sensible man; he won't kill his horses, but he'll have the preacher here on time."

Lonergan nodded. The river-front as they looked at it was deserted. Not a man was in sight, and no noise came from the open doors.

"Say! They're behaving themselves down there today, aren't they?" said Lonergan.

Gaston did not reply. His eyes suddenly had narrowed to slits. That quiet down there wasn't natural. It was too good to be true. Gaston's quick senses had caught the unusual silence and read it for the unnatural calm that is prelude to a storm.

"It's too good, Lonergan," he began. Then, "Hello! There they come!"

Hale's buggy had swung out of the timber and was approaching the river-front. The horses were trotting easily; Gaston could make out the pale face of the minister beside Hale. They were passing the first saloon in the row now. And then the peace of the river-front was broken.

With one single shout, as a signal, there sprang from each side of the street a dozen men. They caught the horses by the head ere Hale could reach his whip. They threw themselves onto the buggy.

It was only a matter of seconds. Then the frightened team was coming up the street on the jump, Hale rolling unconscious on the seat, and the men of the river-front were rushing back into their lowest dive, bearing the struggling figure of the minister with them.

"God!" cried Lonergan.

Gaston uttered no sound. He threw himself upon the maddened horses as they came tearing up, and with Lonergan's help soon had them quieted.

"Good God!" cried men as they came running up.

GASTON said not a word. He dropped his hold on the horses the instant other hands came to help. He looked not at Hale, who lay senseless with a cut on the side of his head; he paid no attention to the crowd gathering about him. With one tug he tore open his collar, to give room to his swelling throat. He was panting through his nose, his lips closed.

A double-bitted ax leaned against the doctor's cabin. With his berserk rage venting itself in one shrill cry, Gaston seized the gleaming tool and seemed to fly over the ground straight toward the door of the dive where the minister had been captured.

"Good God! He's going alone!" cried a young man and, empty-handed, started after him; he was Erik, the boy who had been beaten by the pugilist, and afterward had worked in Gaston's crew on the right-of-way.

"Come back, Thorson!" cried Lonergan.

It would have been too late, even if Gaston could have been halted then.

They were waiting for him down at the river-front. The mind that had directed this scheme had expected that Gaston would be in the van of those to rescue the minister.

"He's gone!" groaned Lonergan.

Gaston was passing McCarthy's old place. In the doorway appeared the bull-necked Ulnick, shot-gun in hand. He laughed as he deliberately cocked both barrels. He had a cigar in his mouth; his face was devilish with triumph as he raised the gun toward his shoulder. And the next instant he lay face downward on his own door-step, shot through the temples, dead.

Tom Pine had not remained in his room in vain. He had not been able to save the minister: that had come too quickly, too unforeseen. But he had witnessed the assault on the buggy, had seen the minister borne away, and he knew what would follow. He had seen Gaston go flying down the street, and his rifle was cocked and ready, covering the river-front as a deer-hunter covers the range before him when the game is about to jump.

Ulnick's was the first menacing figure to show in any doorway, and Tom Pine threw down on him and fired with the sure, easy aim of the old-timer.

Before Ulnick's body had struck the ground, Tom had jacked in a new cartridge and fired again. A man with a revolver had thrust his head out of the dance-hall, and Tom's bullet passed through his jaw and splintered a window.

Then crack, crack, crack! The river-front suddenly had a bath of lead. Into every door Tom sent his bullets, the shots coming so rapidly that it seemed that several men must be firing. Glass flew in splinters. A third man, sticking his head out of a door, was down on the floor, a bullet-hole through his cheek. The screams of the two wounded men supplemented the rattle of shots and the crash of glass.

From the dance-hall a revolver cracked. The bullet flew past Gaston's head. Behind him Erik grunted in surprised fashion and sank down with his hands held to his breast.

Tom riddled the dance-hall in reply. Shrieks and curses came forth, but no more shots.

The river-front was a pandemonium. Women began to leave their dives and run for the woods. Not a man showed himself. Suddenly the minister came rolling out of the dive into the street, thrown out by the terrified men who had captured him. Their plans had gone awry; the terribly accurate shooting of Tom Pine had tamed them; they were eager to do anything that might stop that devilish rain of lead.

Gaston stopped before the dance-hall. His blood-rage had passed; he saw things clearly. In the fight which must ensue, if he rushed the dance-hall, the minister would surely get hurt; possibly be killed, and the wedding would have to be postponed. He looked through the bullet-shattered door. What he saw inside there caused him to pick the minister up under one arm and deliberately turn back. Behind him Tom's bullets ripped the doors of the hall to splinters.

A crowd was coming to help by this time. Men had reached Erik and were carrying him away.

"Get back, boys!" roared Gaston. "Get back and get ready. We're going down there again, but we're going to be ready for them when we do."

He put the minister down and pleaded and fought with the crowd, and turned it back.

"Back, boys! Get to cover! We've got the minister now; the wedding needn't be delayed. And we'll get 'em down there when we're ready."

In a few seconds he had prevailed. The minister had been rushed into the hotel; Erik, sorely wounded, was lying in the doctor's office; and Gaston himself had shown an example and was safely behind cover.

Up in his room Tom Pine sighed with relief. It was about time. He had kept the river-front indoors, but now both rifles were empty.

CHAPTER XL

THE END OF DEVIL DAVE

THE quiet that settled suddenly down upon the settlement then was terrible. It lay like a pall in the air, snuffing out the life and gaiety that had prevailed a moment before. Men moved about silently, their eyes hard. A child cried suddenly somewhere, a door slammed; then it was still again.

Men looked at each other and parted without a word. They gathered their women and children from the street, from about the hotel, the dance-floor and the doctor's new house, and grimly carried them to their homes.

"Stay indoors," they said and returned to the crowd gathered in the shelter of the doctor's office.

No time this for the women to wail and plead against rash action. It had gone beyond that. The women looked at their men's faces and cowered in their homes, white-faced but silent.

"Men!" cried the minister, aghast. "What is this you plan to do?"

"That's all right, Reverend; see you later," they said, and locked him safe out of harm's way in the hotel.

Behind the doctor's office the friends of Erik, men formerly of Crew One, who now were in Lonergan's employ, had armed themselves to the last man and were insisting that although Erik, on the doctor's word, would live, it was their blood-right to lead the attack on the river-front. Opposed to them were the men of the settlement.

"It's our town that's been given a bad name," they said. "We've got the right to go down there first."

Gaston fought steadily to hold both factions back. He realized that the clash was inevitable; but, now that his rage had vented itself, he was clear-headed and cool. If the crowd in its present mood struck the river-front, whose men it outnumbered, the result must be a slaughter. Nothing could stay Erik's friends from taking vengeance, and if a fight were thus started, the gangsters would fight back and good men surely would be killed. As furiously as he had rushed to the attack, Gaston now struggled to delay the conflict until the men had grown cooler.

"The doc's wedding is set for twelve," he shouted. "Are we going to spoil that for him? Let's have the wedding first, then go down and clean them up."

A low growl greeted his words. He knew they would not acquiesce, but it was anything for a delay.

"No time for weddings," came back the reply. "Let's be going."

"No!" cried Gaston. "You'll wait a while. This thing has got to be done orderly. Do you want to give yourselves as bad a name as those Hunyaks?"

"We want to give ourselves such a name that no toughs will ever again try anything like this in our town," replied Perkins.

"Good! That's just it. And we're going to do it according to law and order, not like a lot of toughs on a spree."

That struck home with the older men.

"That's right," they said. Others growled: "Spit out what you've got to say, and let's get started."

"Lonergan," shouted Gaston, "can that old Polander of yours go down among those fellows in safety?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I'm going to serve notice on every man and woman in the river-front to clear out within an hour."

"Hour, ——!" came an interruption. "Ten minutes is plenty."

"Make it five!" cried others.

He compromised with them. It was then a quarter to twelve.

"We'll make it half an hour," said he, realizing that he could hold them no longer. "That will give 'em until a quarter-past twelve."

"Good enough."

Paper and pencil were brought, and with a board for desk Gaston set to work to draft his notice. After scores of suggestions from the crowd he wrote as follows:

TO ALL PEOPLE IN THE RIVER-FRONT:

This is to notify you that you have thirty minutes to get out of town. We are coming down to get you at 12:15. Leave before then, or God help you!

THORSON,
Marshal of Havens Falls.

"That's the style; that's doing it in bang-up fashion," was the verdict of the men who read over his shoulder.

Lonergan's old Polander took the note and his directions stolidly.

"If they can't read, translate it for them," said Gaston.

"Aw ri', bahss!"

The old man sallied forth on his mission. They watched him as he went. How would the toughs receive the note? They saw the old man enter Ulnick's place, where Ulnick's body had been dragged inside, the paper held in his hand. After a few minutes he came out, crossed the street and entered another saloon, still bearing the paper.

Not a sound came up to the watchers. As he emerged from the second place a man came timidly out of the dance-hall and called to the messenger in Polish. The old man spoke rapidly, handing the man the notice. The man tossed it into the dance-hall and without a word, ran for the river road. From Ulnick's some one shouted at the old man. He held up his hand and came back to the doctor's office.

"They say, can they go and you no shoot 'em, hah?" he said.

A sigh of relief escaped Gaston.

"Yes," he said. "Tell them no one will be hurt before a quarter-past twelve."

"Hold on!" cried Erik's friends. "That don't go with us. These guys may all duck out. We won't stand by and see that; we want to play a little with the fellow who shot Erik."

"You bet! None of that letting 'em go. Let's go down and make 'em give him up right now."

Gaston held up his hand.

"Boys, I promise you you'll get the man who shot Erik."

"He's in that dance-hall," they protested. "He'll get away with the rest."

"He's in that dance-hall," agreed Gaston, "but he won't get away with the rest. I promise you that."

"Did you see him?"

"I saw him. And if he comes out, I promise you, I'll be the first to go down and get him."

"All right, Thorson. But that's got to be good."

"It'll be good," said Gaston, and sent the messenger on his way.

There was a short lull after the old man had delivered his message. Then the exodus began. Like rats, the denizens of the places of vice came slinking out in the sunlight. They hugged the walls, casting fearful looks over their shoulders. They saw Ulnick's body lying on the saloon floor, saw the broken windows, splintered doors, and bullet-marks, and they ran.

The two wounded men called pleadingly for assistance, but no one heard. Five minutes before the time-limit had elapsed, the last woman to leave the dives had gone from the river-front and was following the long, straggling line hurrying down the river road, the last of the forces of vileness to leave Havens Falls.

"And the man who shot Erik wasn't among 'em," said Gaston.

"You sure?" Erik's friends were suspicious. "You ain't trying to play with us, Thorson?"

"Sure not, boys; he's still in the dance-hall."

"We'll go and see."

"You will," agreed Gaston icily, "when it's twelve-fifteen."

By sheer force of will he held them. They fidgeted angrily, like dogs in the leash with their quarry before them. The minutes dragged painfully. Two minutes remained. Then one minute.

"Come on," said a youngster, "that's close 'nough."

Gaston held him back.

Presently Lonergan snapped his watch shut and nodded.

"Come along, boys," said Gaston quietly.

They followed down the street in uncanny silence, crowding closely about him as he led the way to the dance-hall. The door was open and they could see inside. They first saw the man whom Tom Pine had shot through the jaw. He was sitting on the floor, leaning drunkenly against the wall.

Then they saw the other man. He was lolling in a chair against the bar, grinning in ghastly fashion at the poor fellow on the floor. His eyes were popping from his head; his jaw sagged weakly; his tongue hung out; his long arms drooped down nervelessly. At his feet a big revolver lay where it had dropped from his fingers.

It was what was left of Devil Dave Taggart.

THE crowd halted at the doorway, aghast at the demoniacal transformation before them. Gaston entered alone. Taggart neither saw nor heard; his attention was all for the man on the floor.

"Taggart!" shouted Gaston, putting a hand on his shoulder.

Taggart looked up slowly, no gleam of intelligence in his blood-shot eyes. In spite of his enmity for the man, Gaston felt a twinge of pity. He picked up the revolver.

"Taggart! Get up!"

With his left arm he raised him to his feet. Taggart waved a hand at the wounded man and laughed slobberingly.

"Funny face," he whispered. "Look at's face."

"Come along," said Gaston.

With the revolver in his right hand he led the way out.

"Boys," he said coldly, "you can't have him—not now. If he'd put up a fight it would have been different. Now I'm going to take him down to his office and lock him up. Out of the way!"

He went straight through them; they stood back and let him pass without a word. Then they followed as Gaston led his prisoner toward the office on the river bank.

Taggart went along in a stupor at first. He did not recognize Gaston, did not sense what was happening. As they approached the river, however, his eyes seemed to clear. At the sight of his own office he stopped suddenly.

"Come on, Taggart," said Gaston.

Taggart looked around wildly. He saw the river a few steps away, saw the crowd behind them, and lastly he saw Gaston. As if in a flash of lightning he understood. With a cry like a wounded animal he tore loose. He stood up straight and stiff, himself for an instant, his eyes upon the man who had torn his evil hold from Havens Falls.

"Thorson, you ——!" he screamed, and dove forward.

His arms caught Gaston and held him helpless. The strength of a maniac was Taggart's for that moment. Down in the sawdust they fell, tightly clinched. Twice they rolled over and over. Taggart's mad laugh rang loud to the heavens; and then they rolled over again and, still locked together, dropped into the river.

The water was deep and still where they fell in. The current closed over them and swept on its way again, serene, undisturbed, while the crowd lined the bank, silent, helpless. The seconds seemed hours. Many of them passed, and still the swift, black waters rushed on unbroken.

Men panted open-mouthed. They groaned in agony as air-bubbles broke the surface. And then they shouted once, sharply. Gaston came popping out of the water like a cork, gasped hungrily at the air, and came swimming weakly back to shore—alone.

A few more bubbles appeared farther down-stream. Then the black water once more was slipping on its way, calm and beautiful as ever, with no hint on its surface of the thing that was hidden in its depths.

Gaston stood dripping and panting on the river bank. He looked at the water from which he had so narrowly escaped. And he turned and went up the street without a word.

"MEN, men!" said the minister, when released from the hotel, "what have you done? You bade me to come among you to join two of your young people in a new life, and you make the day one of strife and bloodshed."

Postmaster Perkins bared his silvery head reverently.

"'The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord!'" rose his aged treble. "Reverend, what we done had to be done. There was a jam, and she had to be broke so decent people could live here, and fellows like you could come through the white water and bring light into the wilderness. The Lord took the bad people away. He giveth us young people, like Hulda Olson and Doc Sanders, to marry and have children, and people the land. The old order changeth, Reverend; the wickedness has gone from Havens Falls for good. The new order cometh, and it's full of hope and promise; and the Lord looks upon His work and finds it good. Reverend, we ain't in no mood to hold the celebration we planned, but in this dark moment we need that wedding to help us look toward the future."

"Yes," said Hulda, firmly. "Ve skäll get married yoost the same."

So the doctor and Hulda were married—with a silent crowd of witnesses where hilarity had been planned. And after the ceremony the minister prayed, not only for the happiness of the newly wedded couple, but for the future of the town, that the men thereof might turn from violence to gentleness toward all their kind, "forgive their enemies, patiently turn the other cheek——"

Gaston looked sharply across at Rose. She had lifted her eyes to him in the same moment.

"—Live their lives soberly and earnestly——"

Her eyes dropped.

"—God-fearing and useful citizens, priding themselves not upon their strength——"

Rose raised her eyes to Hale's bowed head.

"—Amen!"

CHAPTER XLI

DAYS OF QUIET

PEACE had come at last to Havens Falls, the deep, abiding peace of a community solemnly consecrated to law and order. The tragic manner of its coming had left its mark; Havens Falls was not likely to forget what the river-front had meant to it; it would never again run the risk of similar conditions. Before the traces of the last cruel struggle had been removed a solemn mass-meeting was held before Olson's hotel.

"It was whisky that did it, boys—whisky, and wickedness, and hell-raising," quavered old Perkins. "Touch and go, it was, boys; and we happened to win because a man came to town who was big enough to make us strong. We were a helpless little hellhole here in the woods before he came to town. Now we're clean, thank God! As clean as the timber around us. Boys, are we going to risk getting in another gang like what we had? Are we going to have another river-front? Or are we going to have a decent town that will grow and be a credit to the men who made it?"

"A decent town—that's the ticket!" came the responses. "We've had enough of the other thing. What do you say, Thorson?"

Gaston looked down toward the river front. For the time being he was as serious-minded as any man in the crowd. He saw not the glitter and excitement of the front, but only its sordid vileness, its menace to a community of homes, of families, of women and children.

"I say," he began slowly, and paused as a vision grew before his eyes, "I say we ought to burn the river-front to the ground, and scatter the ashes, and build new buildings where it stands, so there'd be nothing left to remind us of what was there or what happened before it was cleaned up."

They voted on it, a vote of hands, and even the wild youngsters working for Lonergan voted, "ay." So the river-front was burned one afternoon when there was no wind, burned until its last trace of wickedness had been purged by fire; and in the evening, before the last red coals had died to ashes, the settlers had decided to build their first schoolhouse where the old dance-hall had stood, and to do it at once, so the children would have a place ready for them when the school season opened in the Fall.

"And now that's done," said Gaston. "The river-front is gone; the town starts new, with nothing to make trouble for it or keep it from having clean hands. Taggart's gone; so I start fresh, too, and there's nothing left here to stir the hell up in me, or get me to fighting, or keep me from living quiet, respectable, and settled."

Tom Pine coughed in a suspicious manner. A coroner's jury having decided that Ulnick's death was "an act of God," Tom had a rather improved opinion of himself. He and Gaston were sitting, chair-tilted, against the front of Dr. Sanders's old office. They had moved into the building immediately after the doctor had vacated, Gaston having declared that it was time they began to practise living in a home of their own. Tom Pine had acquiesced eagerly; there was more freedom in "baching it" than in living at the hotel.

"No-o-o," drawled Tom, "there's nothing left here to stir a fellow up, that's sure."

"And that's just how we want it," said Gaston. "Everything nice and orderly, and nothing to keep a man from being a steady-going citizen!"

"Except himself."

"Eh?"

"Except himself," repeated Tom. "If a man ain't made to be a steady-going citizen, well, it don't make any difference where you set him down, Gaston Olaf, he ain't going to be one, that's all. Some folks are made to live in houses and use the same bed all their lives; others ain't. I won't say any more than that."

"No need to say any more," said Gaston. "You mean that I'm one of those who're not made to settle down."

Tom Pine shook his old head.

"You can't make a canary-bird or a barnyard fowl out of an eagle," said he. "There ain't any chance for argument about that —that's nature."

Gaston chuckled.

"You're a hard one for sure, Tom Pine. Have you seen any canary-bird work around this settlement?"

"Not so far. It's been a nice, busy place for a he-man to camp in up to now, I admit you that. But that was because Taggart and the river-front were here and it was hell-for-leather between them and us.

"But they're gone now, Gaston Olaf; those days are past. This town's pretty near got religion, and it's going to stay that way. What then? Day after day the same thing, week after week, and year after year, with nothing happening for excitement. Could folks like you 'n' me stand it, Gaston?"

The picture unveiled itself swiftly to Gaston. He saw the neat, proper town that Havens Falls was destined to be—day after day, year after year of it. He felt crowded, confined. But there was Rose, and the dream.

"You quit that kind of talk, Tom Pine," he commanded gruffly. "I don't know about you, but I do know that I want to settle down."

He went back to work for Lonergan. That was the thing for him to do—break himself in at steady, every-day work.

His experience in the woods, and his natural leadership of men made him an invaluable aid to the railroad man. With him at its head the clearing-crew slashed its way through the timber in record time.

After the clearing came the grading and filling. Day after day, week after week, Gaston stuck to his task. The short, hot Summer of the Northland was on, and along the line swarms of mosquitoes, deer-flies and "no-see-um's" made life miserable. Men threw down their tools and demanded their time. Lonergan even suggested a lay-off for a week.

"Not for a day," said Gaston stubbornly.

He was beginning to hear the whisperings of doubt within himself. The clear lakes, the rivers, the untracked woods had begun to call. The lure of strange trails and adventures new had whispered to his restless spirit.

He put temptation away savagely. Not a single day would he yield in the program he had mapped out for himself. For it was in the moments of idleness that the call made itself heard.

"You're getting kind of peekid-looking, Gaston Olaf," warned Tom Pine.

"I know it," admitted Gaston. His shaving-mirror had shown him the new lines gathering between the eyebrows and about the mouth.

The quiet, lazy Sundays came to be long and tiresome. He seldom sought Rose's company since their conversation at the house-building, and save for thoughts of her, he admitted to himself, town-life was irksome.

Hale, likewise, spent less time at the Havens home than previously. He was not given to intruding himself where he was not sure that he was wanted.

The settlement developed rapidly. Taggart's property had fallen into the hands of a far-away niece, and the lumber company, to which she sold, promptly put the cut-over land on the market, induced settlers to come in, and began to assist in all ways to build up the country.

"When the railroad gets through, this country will crowd up right away," mused Gaston, as he read the signs.

He reproved himself promptly for such thoughts. Was it not for this that he had worked and risked his life?

The heat of the Summer passed, and the time for the first frosts drew near. Instead of the ring of the axes of the clearing-crew there now rang out along the right-of-way the clang of spiking hammers fastening the steel rails to the new-laid ties. Instead of teams bearing loads of ties, a small locomotive came tooting slowly toward Havens Falls, pushing before it flat-car loads of the rails that the crews were laying.

Day by day the twin lines of steel crept northward toward the settlement, and day by day, as he led his crew, Gaston sensed how completely the humdrum of civilization would conquer the country when the railroad began operations. The toot of the locomotive in the timber was a warning. It knelled the passing of adventure in that part of the Big Woods.

Yet Gaston worked steadily. There was a certain thrill in the building of the railroad, and he did not permit himself to think of the days to come after the road was finished.

The first frosts came, touching the birch and maple with a gentle wand, and tinting their leaves dainty pink and yellow. The air was like rare wine, and the woods were clamorous with the chatter of birds congregating for the long flight southward.

In the morning, while trudging to work, Gaston paused and with his eyes followed the flight of migrating ducks across the trackless sky. He watched them until they were out of sight, and he wondered what new scenes they would view before they sought rest at nightfall.

The whistle of the locomotive now could be heard in the settlement. Lonergan had added more men to the crews, and the work was being pushed so the road would be completed before the frost settled into the ground. Gaston did his work steadily and well, but there was a lack of buoyancy and enthusiasm in him. He now looked forward to the end of the work with a feeling of discomfort.

The woods were a riot of color now. Autumn was in the Northland, and the gods of the glorious Indian Summer had painted the world with a lavish brush. Deep purple and burnt umber, blood-red and faintest yellow ocher, rioted together on the landscape; and over the hills, like a delicate veil, hung the Indian Summer's faint blue haze.

With less than a week's work remaining on the railroad, there came to the settlement a rumor of a silver strike in the rough barrens far to the north, across the line. Daring, adventurous men were flocking thither, said rumor, to pit their strength and luck against the cruel northern Winter and crueler men. The men working on the railroad leaned on their tools and wondered what it would be like up there. Gaston heard them and grimly ordered them back to their tasks.

That night, however, he paced up and down along the river until far into the morning, and his palms were raw from the pressure of his finger nails.

CHAPTER XLII

"THE TRAIL, THE TRAIL!"

THE railroad was finished. The twin streaks of steel had reached Havens Falls, binding it closely to the rest of the great civilized world.

The finish came at the end of a hard day's work. Remained only the ceremony of driving the last spike, which was to be performed with due rites and celebration in the morning, and the first train, bearing mails, freight and passengers would come tooting its way into the settlement. The big job was done, and Havens Falls was full of gaiety that night, anxious to make of the morrow a big gala-day in its history.

Gaston was not gay. He was the last man of the crew to leave the line. He left reluctantly. The job was done. Havens Falls was no longer a stray, woods-settlement, but a new growing town on a railroad.

In the old settlement he had had his place. He had played his part well. But what place did he have in this town, where people were talking of flour-mills and potato-warehouses, and dreaming of paved streets and electric-lights?

This was the question that had troubled him for the last weeks. As the signs of the town's development increased, so had increased Gaston's sense of strangeness and confinement. He felt cooped up, cramped, and out of place. He had tried to deny it, but now he was forced to acknowledge to himself. He did not belong.

Stores and sidewalks, plate-glass windows, regular hours, electric-lights! What had he to do with them? He had come to Havens Falls and had found a part waiting for him to play. But now his part had been played; never again would the settlement have need of one of his kind; his job was done; he was through.

With something like a sigh Gaston turned his back on the line and came through the cool, early darkness into Havens Falls.

The town was full of people, on hand for the great event of the morrow. At the hotel there was no talk save of the railroad and what it would do for the country.

In the midst of this liveliness Gaston was as a stranger at a feast. He retired to the doctor's old office and without a word Tom Pine and he sat down on their door-step, each busy with the same thought. Up above, the white northern stars began to gleam through the darkness. And in the lull the cry of a lone wolf on some far-away hill-top came floating into the town.

"I wonder," said Tom Pine softly, "I wonder what she's like up there where they say they've found silver?"

The words fell upon Gaston's troubled spirit like skilled fingers upon the strings of a harp. Eagerly he began to talk. The little town fell away and he saw the long, rough trail through the great rough North, with who could know what sort of adventures at its end!

"She's a hard piece of country up there from all I hear," interjected Tom Pine, "and harder than Sam Hill to get to."

Pooh! What was a little rough country? Did any one expect to find metals stored up beneath city sidewalks? The harder the better! None but real men could win in. All the more for the ones who were strong enough to stand the going.

Gaston rose and stood before Tom Pine, gesticulating vehemently. The new lines had gone from his face; he felt as if a burden had fallen from his shoulders. Then suddenly he thought of Rose and sat down.

After a while he arose and went slowly up toward the Havens home. He would go and see her. He would settle it one way or another that night.

ROSE was working on something white when he found her, and though she hastily dropped it into her work-basket at his coming he saw that it was a garment so tiny that in his ignorance he fancied it must be for a doll.

"What's that?" he asked. "Making a doll dress?"

"Yes—no," she said, tucking her work out of sight. "That is—Gaston, you mustn't be so inquisitive."

"Wha-a-at?" Her confusion puzzled him. She was actually blushing. "What's there about a doll's dress that you've got to hide it from me?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing. What do you care about dolls' clothes, anyway?"

"Then why don't you work at it? Don't let me interfere."

"It isn't polite to work when one's entertaining company," she bantered.

"Go on and work," he laughed. "I like to see you sewing."

"Sewing!" she said scornfully. "Oh, how ignorant men are! I wasn't sewing at all; that's embroidery. It will take weeks and weeks to finish it."

"Embroid——?"

"Gaston!" He had playfully reached for the garment. "Gaston! Well, I never!"

He was holding the tiny thing up in his huge, brown hands.

"Embroidery?" he repeated, looking at her, and then he understood.

"Oh, oh," he said slowly, and carefully replaced the dress in the basket. "I'm a clod-hopper. I didn't understand; I wouldn't have said a word or touched it——"

"You're as curious as a woman," she said, tucking the garment out of sight.

"I apologize; you see, I didn't know."

"I know it." They looked at one another.

"Who's it for?"

"Hulda, of course. Now if you say another word, one single word, I'll be real angry."

"Hulda?" he repeated. "The doc? Well, I'll be darned!"

"Stop it! Not another word." Rose's self-possession had returned. "Tell me, who is going to drive the last spike in the road tomorrow? I've heard that the honor is to be given you."

He answered aimlessly. His thoughts were not with the road. The little garment had spoken to him of certain things, had opened his eyes to tender responsibilities of marriage. And at last he was quite sure of himself—quite sure that he had no right to try to realize his dream. For whatever happened, he must not run the risk of making her unhappy.

"I'm going away," he said, holding out his hand.

"I thought so," she said, and he was glad she smiled. "I've seen it coming on you."

They shook hands warmly.

"Are you going away for good?" she asked.

He studied a moment before replying. She would have Hale now, Hale, the steady and responsible. She would be happy.

"Yes," he said, "thank God, it is for good!"

Outside, beneath the clear white stars, he breathed to the bottom of his lungs. He had done it. With a smiling face he had done it. And though the pain in his heart was like a sharp knife he had the peace of mind which told him he had done what was —square.

Down the street he met the doctor.

"You old son-of-a-gun, you Doc!" he chuckled and smote him boyishly on the back.

He found Hale in his store.

"Hale," said he sternly, "you're a darn fool. There's a girl up the street waiting for you and you stick down here and grouch by yourself. How d'you expect to win Rose if you don't go after her? I know—I know what you're going to say. Staying away on my account. Well, that needn't bother you any more. I'm going away. Going to stay away. And if you don't go up there tonight and get down to business I'll—I'll change my opinion of you. Will you do it?"

"But, Thorson——"

"But nothing! Say you'll do it."

"I will."

"Skookum! Shake hands."

He went out of the store like a gust of wind, humming.

When he entered the doctor's old office some time later he bore two blanket packs, stuffed and strapped, ready for the trail. Tom Pine was asleep. Gaston dug out his old woods-clothes and noiselessly made a complete change. Arrayed as he was when he had come to the settlement—soft rubber shoes, buckskin trousers, muskrat cap, blue shirt and silken sash—he sat down for a moment at the doctor's old table.

His light-heartedness left him. He folded his arms on the table and laid his head upon them. He had done what was square. But it was hard. Oh, it was hard!

The picture of Rose as he had last seen her, with the tiny white garment in her hands—the picture he would carry away with him—came before his eyes, and he raised his head slowly. There was a strange wistful smile upon his bronzed face.

The thoughts of little children came to him. His great arms curved hungrily on the table. Flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone. Was he never to know what that meant? The home, the wife, the children; the trinity that makes the world. He hungered for them then, with the strong man's hunger, which the weakling never knows.

But he knew now that these were not for him. His was the lot of the roamer. For him the open trail beneath untrammeled stars, the life of abrupt change and excitement, the lone but thrilling way of the born adventurer.

Foot-loose and free. It had to be so. It could not be anything else. For he knew now that no ties could hold him when the go-gods called.

"Tom!" he called softly.

His old partner leaped up, wide awake. Gaston was standing by the bunk-side, the pack on his shoulders, rifle in hand, ready.

"Come on, Tom; there's your pack. The moon's up; we're going to travel."

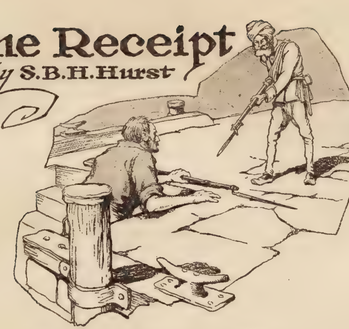
Up on the crest of the ridge where they had stood when they first saw the town, they paused and looked back. The lights of the settlement gleamed like pin-pricks in the darkness. One light gleamed particularly bright. Gaston looked at it a long time before turning his back. Then he threw up his head and laughed, his right arm pointing northward.

"The trail, Tom Pine, the trail!" he cried. "Hit the trail!"

THE END

The Receipt

by S.B.H. Hurst



Author of "The Third Chance," "The Marrow-Bone," etc.

A NUMBER of years ago, a private soldier of a certain British regiment, then stationed at Calcutta, was sent to the Andaman Islands—the Indian penal settlement—to serve a life-sentence for murder. There were extenuating circumstances, and his name was William Driver. He believed in no gods, though he swore by many, but he worshiped most devoutly one girl, and he was a very strong man. He was also a crude person of limited education, and the girl, Annie Hall, was the marrow-bone of his existence.

Therefore, in a most wonderful way, she helped him to escape from the Andamans to the deep forests of Burma, where they had ideas of living in a tree. My old friend, Pickhead Cameron, who was at that time head of the Forest Department, persuaded them to build a hut, to which he added comforts. He also persuaded them to be married—by a Presbyterian missionary—and for many years he aided them, so that they were not discovered by that Government which paid his somewhat large salary.

In the course of time a baby was born to the Drivers, and the missionary baptized the child, and Cameron was her godfather. And the girl, living alone in those wild forests with her parents, grew to be very lovely. On her eighteenth birthday Cameron gave her a pearl necklace, and the missionary her first communion. Shortly after, Cameron was called home to London, and the missionary, his work done, was called home also.

And Bill Driver mourned their going, for, as he said to his girl:

"Mr. Cameron, he's gone to London, and I daren't go there; and Mr. MacNeil, he's gone to heaven—so your mother says—and I carn't go there neither."

Now, Pickhead Cameron had so arranged matters that the Drivers saw no other humans; and Bill—who, by the way, stood only five-feet-six and weighed nearly two hundred in hard condition—had done his best to show his gratitude. Cameron's pride was in the administration of his forests, and Driver fully appreciated this, so that he patrolled the district wherein he abided and looked out for incipient fires and other things. And when he wandered in the deep green of the mighty teak trees, he carried a rifle which had been with him for a long time, and for which Cameron supplied the ammunition. With the carefully kept rifle always went the well-polished bayonet. On the evening that Bill and his woman Annie escaped from the Andamans, she clubbed a Sikh guard into insensibility—the source of the treasured weapons.

So, MacNeil and Cameron went home, but Driver still patrolled the district, as he knew Cameron would have him do. What thinking he did during his lonely walks was of an atavistic character, and he had some curiously anthropomorphic ideas regarding the dead MacNeil.

THERE came an evening. The shadows were beginning to lie softly over the dim forest places, and Bill Driver, hungry, sought his hut, his wife and daughter, and also his supper. He was about a mile from his home when his slowly working intelligence was startled by the cry of a woman. And the voice of that woman was the voice of his daughter—Annie the second.

Bill Driver hurled himself in the direction of that cry, crashing through the intervening brush like a shell from a big gun. The rifle went with him, but when he reached the small open space where his daughter was struggling with a man, he dropped it.

The red haze in which years before he had shot and killed, again enveloped him; but he could not forget—he had brooded too long over it—that the mere pulling of a trigger had given him no physical satisfaction, and had made him a convict, so that while justified in defending his own, memory bade him use the mighty clutch of his great hands in her defense, and, thus, satisfy the innate craving of the fighting man.

Annie's assailant saw Bill coming—he also must have heard him—and he released the girl and tried to escape. He might have escaped from an angry gorilla, but not from Bill Driver. The strength of the gorilla and of Driver would be about equal.

In the convict's subconscious mind arose several of his long dead fathers—hairy people who patronized no tailor. Bill was not aware of their presence, but their prompting swayed him. The man who struggled so impotently was a large man. Bill could not see clearly, because of the red haze, but he knew quite well that it was his business to tear the fellow to pieces.

As a preliminary, he broke both his captive's arms. He dropped his almost swooning victim on the ground. It would never do to kill him right away; that would be as unsatisfactory as the shooting referred to had been. He must pull the fellow to pieces slowly, yet he must keep him in such a mental condition that he would be fully and excruciatingly aware of his dismemberment.

Bill Driver, standing over a writhing human, puzzled his slow brain. Then Annie the second reached him, threw her arms around his neck, and brought him out of the year 300,000 B. C. into A. D. 1912.

Bill Driver shook his bull-neck, and the red fell away from his vision. But his strength and vindictiveness remained.

"Go away, lass—he were trying to hurt thee more than thou knows abart."

"But, father?"

"I mun kill him, lass—an' he's going to know I'm doing it."

"But—don't you see he's a white man?"

"Don't make no difference."

"But, father, it does. Mr. Cameron wouldn't have stray white men around here—what's he doing here? You must find out, and let Mr. Cameron know. He asked you to watch out for things."

There has been told a tale about a man who aided a wounded lion, and thereby earned the lion's undying gratitude. We have all heard of "dog-like devotion." But greater than either of these was Bill Driver's gratitude to my old friend Pickhead Cameron.

He raised his writhing captive to a sitting position, by gripping an ear between a finger and thumb.

"Wot you doing in these 'ere forests?"

"I vill not tell you," moaned the other.

"Oh—you won't, eh? Nobody ain't got no right here unless Mr. Cameron says so. And you're some sort of a foreigner, wot makes it worse. Wot are ye doing here?"

The captive's arms hung helplessly, and Driver's method of supporting him was agonizing. Nevertheless, he did not answer the question.

"There must be something wrong," exclaimed Annie the second, clasping her hands nervously, "or he'd tell you, father. You don't want Mr. Cameron's forests to come to no harm. You must make him tell."

Bill Driver's grin was not pleasing.

"He'll tell," he said tersely. "You bring the rifle, lass."

He threw his groaning captive across his shoulder and walked toward his hut at the regulation quickstep that had never left him, the girl following with the precious rifle. The tortured creature he carried moaned all the way, but Driver paid no attention to his pain, neither did he stop to rest or shift the weight—his slow mind was busy with vague guesses.

Adjoining his hut was a smaller one, used as a storehouse. Into this Driver flung his captive; then he fastened him securely and went to join his wife and daughter, who were eagerly discussing the affair. And the mother was all aflame also—for had not the thing in the outhouse tried to assault her girl, and did it not seem that he meant evil to the beloved forests of Pickhead Cameron? Yet they ate their supper with thorough British regard for the inner-man, a great creed which the growth of the Empire endorses daily.

Once Driver left the meal, to roughly gag the man in the outhouse; for the English like to eat in comfort, and the crying of the wounded captive was disturbing. Then Driver smoked a pipe and performed certain mental processes almost analogous to thinking.

"He'll tell," he remarked as he lit a second pipe before proceeding to the outhouse. "Don't heed his 'ollering—it's Mr. Cameron's business."

Then he went to interview his captive; and that which he did was not nice. In the abstract it was a boy looking for the inward principle of a watch; in the concrete, a gorilla similarly interested in, say, a pigeon. I knew Bill Driver very well, and I think he liked me; but I am also of a scientific turn of mind, and, therefore, I tell the facts.

When the other showed a willingness to speak, Bill removed the gag.

"My countrymen will come to find me," said the captive.

"Oh," responded Driver, "how many are there—fifty?"

"Two."

Bill laughed.

"Don't—oh, don't!" shrieked the captive.

"Tell, then."

"Will you let me go if I do?"

Bill Driver significantly lifted the rough gag from the mud floor of the outhouse, and the captive, snatching at the one chance of freedom from further agony, spoke.

"You've heard of the Andaman Islands—prison?"

Over Driver's face flashed the expression of the hunted animal. The gag dropped from his hand; he bared his teeth, and his forehead wrinkled as he snarled —

"So—you found out—summat—and you —come here—to, to——"

"Wait, wait!" shrieked the other. "You don't understand."

"Yus, I do. And, you swine, you tried to—to—to—my girl."

"Listen. Oh, listen, please. Let me tell."

"You tell me—tell me quick—where is the other two that's after me?"

Bill Driver pressed his heavy chin on the other's nose, moving it just enough.

"We're not after you; never—heard—of you," moaned the captive.

Bill Driver lifted his face and stared.

"You never heard I was at the Andamans —and got away?" he asked.

"You escaped?" gasped the captive, forgetting his misery in astonishment.

Bill Driver was himself again.

"How do you want to die?" he asked.

"But all we want to do is to rescue a man from the Andamans—help him get away, like you did."

The affair was too complicated for Bill's mind. He had no objection to another poor devil escaping, but he had many objections to his place of hiding becoming known. Besides, the fellow had attempted to assault his daughter; and what was he doing in the forest, anyhow?

"How do you want to die?"

Inside the outhouse it was quite dark, but neither man felt the need of any more light. Outside, the bats flew low and the teak trees woke to their evening whisperings.

"Let me tell you—we will give you money —we don't care about you. Don't you see that if we help another man to escape we daren't tell about you?"

"Well?"

The prisoner gasped out his tale, which was to the effect that a Burman—the leader of a gang of highway robbers (dacoits)—had been caught in the periodical dragnet of the Department of Justice. As usual, he produced a host of friends who swore that he was an innocent man. They went on the stand and testified that he not only abhorred dacoitry, but that he was of so spiritual a nature that he could not even wring the neck of a chicken. Unfortunately for the dacoit there was other evidence, and the other evidence convinced the judge that the Andaman Islands would make an excellent abiding place for the remainder of that dacoit's life. And so he sent him there. It was the philanthropic desire of Driver's captive and his two countrymen to rescue said highway robber.

"Well?" said Bill Driver when the tale was told.

"His poor wife cries for him," explained the other.

But Bill came of a nation of shopkeepers.

" 'Ow much are you getting for doing it?" he asked.

The other hesitated.

"How do you want to die?" said Driver.

"There are mines."

"Yus?"

"Ruby mines that we made quite sure the man at the Andamans knows about—oh, we are very sure. Ve vill get him away, and for doing so get the place of the mines."

"Well?"

"If you will let me go, I will—give you half my share."

"How did you get into these 'ere forests?"

"I was lost," replied the other with apparent truthfulness. "My friends are at—a fishing village."

Bill saw his daughter struggling in his captive's arms. The captive could not see Bill's face.

"I ain't got nothing against you 'elping a poor devil escape, but—how are you going to do it?"

"It's all arranged," said the other eagerly. "In native sailboats we go—with machine guns that came as sewing-machines. We will have thirty Burmans with us, just for the hard work, because with our machine guns we could do it alone. The convict station has no cable or anything, and the guard-ship—pooh! Just a few *colashe* sailors with old rifles and ten rounds of ammunition, and English officers with swords. We take our sail-ships, and nobody suspects. The soldiers—about hundred and fifty—have also just a few rounds of cartridges. It is easy."

"Well?"

"We go close to guard-ship—little steamer, you know. We go close like poor sailship in distress, asking for water. Guard-ship we easy find, but if in harbor just the same. Then we kill all on guard-ship, easy, and——"

"Well?"

During his short acquaintance with William Driver the captive had found little cause for amusement. Now he laughed unpleasantly:

"Then we free all the convicts—fifteen thousand black men. The convicts very glad to kill guards and soldiers. We help with our machine guns. Then, while the convicts are having little fun, we take our man away, and nobody ever know about us. Afterward, convicts blamed—mutiny. Who will believe tale about white men coming and freeing them? We only take our man—no more. Lots will be killed. So, we free all convicts to get them blamed, and to keep soldiers busy while we take our man away. But we leave convicts having their little fun, so we get away without being bothered by many wanting to go with us."

"Fun?" asked William Driver.

"Yes—we tell convicts about English women, you know."

Bill Driver's powerful body twitched strangely. About his lips was a slight froth.

"Yes," added the prisoner. "English women—wives—girls—fifteen thousand black murderers—very few soldiers—very little ammunition."

A wounded gorilla will first scream, then mutter automatically and continue to mutter. Bill did not scream, but he had no control of his words.

"Near twenty years ago I told Annie I loved her. Then I read a book about what the blacks did to the English women in the Mutiny, Cawnpore and the like. And I were scared that some black might do it to my Annie, and so I shot the first black I saw. It were foolish of me, because the blacks in India are now all decent folks, except those they send to the Andaman Islands. They sent me to the Andamans for shooting the black, and I deserved it. Annie helped me escape. I read it in a book. Read just what them blacks will do when your friends lets them loose. You won't be there. And—my daughter."

I do not know what Bill Driver did with his captive.

I know that he went to his hut obsessed with the importance of a mission; that in spite of the pleadings of the women who loved him, he gave certain orders and made known his intention.

The wife and daughter were to do their best to get to Moulmein, where there was a telegraph. If they got there, they were to see to it that the authorities sent a man-of-war to the Andamans. As Bill put it:

"It will take maybe a week to get there. If I went, they'd want to know all about me, and they'd put me in jail. Then they'd take a month to investigate—and think wot them black convicts could do in a month. Now, you go to Moulmein, and use Mr. Cameron's name, and get a telegram to him. But be careful not to say a word abart what he done for us. Do all you can to make 'em send a man-of-war. I'm going to the Andamans to warn 'em—if I get there in time."

"But—" from Annie the first.

"No buts, lass. There ain't no need to tell who I am, though I'd go anyhow. You start for Moulmein."

So they parted at the little hut, in the midst of a circle of great teak trees, where years before they had had notions of making their home in one of them, where Pickhead Cameron had found them, and where MacNeil had married them.

BILL DRIVER, taking with him some few stores and the precious rifle and bayonet, made a forced march of twenty-six hours to the coast and when he left the jungle at a tiny fishing village, the haunting smell of the clear sea brought memories of the fog-bound spirit of England, and of the warmer wraith forbidding escape from the Andaman Islands. The tremulous stimulant of sentiment shivered his spine with recollection, and he clutched his rifle the more tightly as he circled the huts of the fishermen.

Quietly he laid his small stock of food and water in the stern of a boat, cut the grass-rope hawser and got aboard. There was a slight creaking when he hoisted the single sail, but the fishermen were asleep and the light breeze was off the land. And Bill Driver steered in the general direction of east and south, down a wavering lane of moonlight that seemed to beckon him along his not-too-accurate course.

It is necessary to guess at the details of that voyage. Nearly twenty years before he had crossed that same part of the Indian Ocean, in the scow known at the Andamans as the "milk-boat," with the woman who had shown him the way of escape—and a terrible voyage it had been. For it had only been by favor of the god of the chances that they had made the coast of Burma, despite their own heroic efforts. And what I once told about it came from Annie, in the main, for, as has also been told, Bill was no teller of tales.

So, regarding the voyage when he went back, only guesses can be made, since he went alone. Besides, there is another reason. But I am inclined to think, because I have been a sailor all my life and know how limited was Bill's knowledge of the craft—I, indeed, state without fear of contradiction, that the imperious, though ever-bibulous, god of the chances again aided the man; and that, furthermore, that same decadent deity prevailed upon his brother tippler who rules so laxily over the minor winds. For Bill Driver, by simply keeping his frail boat before it, made the harbor of Port Blair on the morning of the seventh day. And during the passage he saw no other ship.

The early morning mists were wreathing into fantasies as Bill rounded the point. These lifted suddenly, and the penal settlement thrust itself into his vision, but there was nothing unpleasing about its appearance. The man stared at the place, and the place seemed to stare back at the man, and the man felt a sense of friendliness. It was as if he had met an old enemy, with whom he had once fought a hard battle, but with whom he now clasped hands.

And it was all the same—Hope Island, where he had lived in his lonely hut; the settlement of Port Blair, with the men's barrack-like jail on that island, divided by a strip of water from the women's jail; the hilly island where the paroled convicts started independent life again, and, up the estuary, Viper, where the worst characters were confined.

The harbor was empty, neither the guard-boat nor the convict-carrying ship being there.

The breeze died, and Bill lowered the sail, and, with great effort got out the clumsy oars. Dizzily he looked toward the bungalows of the officers, then he began to row toward the chief commissioner's private wharf. When a convict it had been his business to row the milk boat from island to island, and the chief commissioner's wharf had been his first place of call.

The heavy oars seemed to have wills of their own, and Bill could hardly control them. On the wharf a tall sikh guard roused from his dozing and watched him come.

Bill Driver made the boat fast to the worn cleet on the steps of the landing. He clawed out of her like a man trying to scale a cliff, and made his way feebly up the steps on hands and knees. Half-way up he paused and laughed vacantly, for he had discovered that he had reached the right place and that his fearful voyage was over. It also occurred to him that he had eaten and drank but little, and that he had not slept at all.

"Abbe kitha jartha?"

Bill, at the head of the steps, looked up to the voice. It was a long time since he had heard Hindustanee spoken. Some one wanted to know where he was going. Bill's soul tried to tell the voice that it was none of that voice's —— business, but his lips were working like an infant's at breast-time, and the words he tried to get between them trailed off into curious little noises which mocked him.

Then he forgot where he was going, and, struggling to remember, memory asserted itself over the vague impressions of the present. And memory told Bill that he was again a convict confined, and that he had grown tired of the loneliness, and that he was going to kill the Sikh guard on the chief commissioner's wharf, so that he would be hanged and suffer no more.

He lay down on the rough planking and wandered in the past.

His mind swirled to the boat he had just left. There were two boats. No—one boat. He had taken that boat from a Burman fishing village, and he had grinned at the moon when he took it. From just behind that moon the voice again spoke to him.

"Who are you?" it said in English.

And Bill Driver opened his eyes and looked up at the tall Sikh guard. Then he clutched feebly at his precious rifle. The Sikh had grown gray in service, and Bill had changed also, but the men knew one another at once.

"Toom kady."

"Yus," muttered Bill, "it's me. This 'ere was once your rifle—my girl hit yer, and took it. I ain't come to kill yer this time. Did yer know that one morning I were going to throttle you? I went behind that there hedge, and I trod on some English flowers wot were growing there, and the smell of them made me weepy. My girl—wot had come here as a maid to the chief commissioner's sister — found me there blubbing. So, I didn't throttle yer."

The Sikh's rifle had followed every movement of William Driver. Indeed, I think that it was only the uncanniness of his arrival that saved him. The Sikh was superstitious, and Bill had not only reappeared to him out of the morning mists, but it was as if the rugged personality of the famous convict had suddenly and fearsomely thrust itself forth from the gathered years. Besides, he was supposed to be dead. Any other man would have been dead.

But when the guard felt quite sure that his old enemy was not dead, he grinned relievedly behind his great beard. Then he stepped forward and removed the precious rifle from the unresisting fingers. Then he fired his own rifle into the air and alarmed the colony.

And Bill Driver, unable to stand, but again conscious, glared up at the Sikh, looking for trouble and cursing his inability to cause it. The chief commissioner's bungalow was only about a hundred feet from the wharf, a carefully cultivated flower garden separating. Consequently Sir George Furlong was the first man to reach the place of alarm.

"Bot budmash waller hi, Burra Sahib," explained the Sikh.

But the guard's explanation was not sufficiently particular. The chief commissioner only saw an exhausted white man stretched out on his private wharf—a white man who was apparently a stranger to the islands.

"Who is he—what do you mean?"

Bill was so weak that when he looked at things they appeared to be separated from him by a glass globe full of water. The man talking to the Sikh was not the old chief commissioner of his time of captivity, and he loomed above him like an attenuated ghost. Perhaps Bill guessed at his identity. By forcing all his will into his mighty muscles he managed to raise his hand and salute.

"I'm Bill Driver, sir," he said, "wot—got away—from here."

Then he fainted again, as the wharf became crowded with half-dressed officers and men. The doctor knelt by Driver's side.

"Get some brandy. No, he's pretty well worn out—a hypo's better."

The sun flooded the harbor, and Port Blair glittered like a diamond. Two soldiers supported Bill whilst the contents of the hypodermic syringe warmed life into him, and the men and women on the chief commissioner's wharf watched in a tense silence, plaided with the colors of speculation and memory.

And this was Bill Driver, the famous convict. The only man who had ever escaped from the Andamans, and—a man whom a woman had really loved. Wonderful William Driver! What was it you had that made your Annie love you? It wasn't only your strength. Other men might equal that. I almost can myself. You who so seldom spoke, and never heard of verses—what was there in you, William Driver? Why should the tender Fate who tries to arrange the love-affairs of men have made a special effort on your behalf? For—a woman loved you for yourself alone! Then how had he come back to the penal settlement—where had he been all the years—and for what reason had he returned?

"I read it in a book," muttered Bill.

"Yes, yes, we know," said the doctor soothingly. "But that was very long ago."

"Abart a week—a long week," muttered Bill.

The doctor studied him.

"No fever. Why is he delirious?"

The chief commissioner interrupted—

"Driver, why have you come back?"

The sunlight hurt Bill's sleep-craving eyes and made him angry.

"Some grub and a sleep, and I'll help ye."

"Yes, yes—you came to help us?"

"Swine," muttered Bill. "There was two swine—no, three at the start—there's only two now. I came to tell you—and I'll help you."

"Yes, Driver—go on."

"Swine," replied Bill.

"Can't you help him, doctor—give him something?"

"He'll be all right, sir, after we get food into him and let him sleep."

"But, you don't think he came back here for the fun of it, do you. Give him something."

The doctor obeyed reluctantly.

"Read it in a book, about swine," whispered Bill. "And the swine is coming here."

"Yes, Driver—go on."

"Wot's—the—name of—guard-boat?"

"The *Mayo*."

"Swine—got her—killed all—crew."

"What?"

"Don't bother — abart convicts. Look out—for women. Worse than Cawnpore—coming."

Along the morning breeze came the unmistakable rattle of a machine gun, punctuated by some rifle-shots.

"Wot did—I tell yer," muttered Bill. "Now—look out. They got the guardship."

"I don't quite understand," said the chief commissioner. "Tell me, Driver."

"Forrin swine—going to loose convicts—tell 'em abart white women, he said—just like in book I read—abart mutiny—machine guns."

"God! Why doesn't the Government give us a cable?"

Bill blinked up at the chief commissioner and spoke confidentially, also confidently.

"Just hold on, sir. It's all right—just hold on, and my Annie will bring a man-o'-war."

Shortly afterward, Bill Driver came as near blushing as he ever did in all his turbulent life, for two very aristocratic ladies were feeding him beef tea with silver spoons.

They fed him, and two Tommies put him to bed. He insisted that the precious, if somewhat archaic, rifle should be laid by his side.

"When the trouble starts," he explained, "I want the old girl handy."

He slept for several hours, and woke to all his strength again, licking his lips at the appetizing fight before him—a fight that had commenced shortly after he had warned the garrison, which had, however, been able to build a fairly strong protection of sandbags, wherein the women were now doing their best to soothe the pain of many wounded men, for the small stock of anesthetics and anodynes had been exhausted.

It was nearing sunset, and all the wonder-colors of the Indian Ocean appeared to be playing with the fish jumping in the harbor. There was a lull in the fighting, for the convicts were busy with their evening curry and rice. Also, the more subtle were holding conferences. The first abandon of freedom had worn itself out, and some were beginning to see a rift in the altruism of the two foreigners who had freed them. The fingers of many dead pointed to an unpleasing end.

An ancient murderer nibbled at a piece of dried fish, and spoke between nibbles.

"They came," he said, "and they captured the Ag boat, on which they put their many-mouthed guns. They sailed close to where the British have made them a fort, and, the water being shallow, they grounded. With much effort they got off. Meanwhile, their men let us go free—telling us to seek revenge and the white women. Now, my brothers, what is the reason of this doing? In what way are these two white men, who are not English, interested in our enjoyments. Many of us are dead, and the English still hold the fort."

"It is said that they hate the English because they are white, yet are not English—being of a lower caste," suggested another.

"And that there is a great war coming, after which there will be no more English; at which time all men will be free," said a third.

"Free," sneered the ancient. "Who is free? What is free? Even a rajah is not free. By his women is he enslaved as are others by opium. When this matter of killing the English in this place is concluded, what then? Suppose it is but the revenge of the two white men who are not English. Well, we will have helped at that revenge, and had our fill of women's screams. Then will the two white men want to take the *Mayo* Ag boat and go back to their place—which will show us their wisdom. My brothers—" he leaned forward in the little circle—"we, who are wise men, and friends, must see to it that we, also, go from here in that *Mayo* Ag boat. I have a memory that the British Government has a long arm."

"It might have been wise," said another thoughtfully, "had we gone to the side of the British. They have a lion for their caste-mark, and ever do many seek to kill that lion. He is a sleepy lion and wakes but slowly. But when he does wake he makes the jungle tremble with his rage, and all the lesser beasts hide from him. Did not my father tell me——"

And so on. There was infinite chattering. Relatives and old cronies in crime jubilated over the cooking-pots. The women prisoners had their peculiar place in the orgy. The dark closed over a chorus of nasty noises. The few little circles of old men gabbled wisely, but the mass was a thoughtless horde craving many things.

BILL DRIVER, rubbing his eyes with one great hand and trailing the precious rifle with the other, had reported himself to the captain in command of the white soldiers. And that officer had said things to William which made him feel lumpy inside, made him feel that he could just about lick a hundred of the enemy. Very much embarrassed, he tried to explain this feeling.

"I'm only a third-class shot," he stammered, "but I'm useful with the butt and baynit."

And over it all hung the peculiarly peaceful smell of the wood fires. The bats flew low. In the creeks and estuaries the mist-wraiths began to form.

But there was a hideous unanimity about the killing of the garrison, which was fostered exceedingly when some genius of a convict found the commisariat sergeant's store of wines and spirits. There are certain castes in India that profess to abhor drink, but religion is at times elastic.

The machine guns spluttered. The defenders fired at the advancing menace, but the terrain favored the convicts with every sort of cover, and they were able to creep almost up to the defenses before attacking with their axes, adzes and weapons looted from the *Mayo*. It must be remembered that there were about fourteen thousand convicts, and that the two machine guns effectually prevented any sortie of the garrison which was so very short of ammunition.

And the whole affair had been so unexpected, so unprepared for. Many of the defenders felt that they were in a hideous nightmare, out of which they would wake in due time; and in that belief many died. Description of it all is as impossible as would be the description of a burning building. It was fight, fight, fight.

The drink worked in the convicts and the moon set. Then they began firing the houses, making a glimpse of an indecent hell as they ran about with torches. And ever the ammunition in the little fort dwindled. Thus, with all Port Blair ablaze, the last round was served out, and the men were told of this fact. Some grinned, some swore, some said nothing, each after his fashion; but all grimly held on.

Shortly before daylight an order was whispered to certain men. It had to do with the use of the shells in some revolvers. These were on no account to be fired at the enemy.

The dark lifted to the kiss of the dawn. The breath of morning moved over the harbor. The ammunition of the defenders was exhausted. The convicts came on, careless of creed distinction, howling in a reeling frenzy—Hindoos, Mohammedans, every caste known to India and Burma. The settlement echoed to their yells as they swirled forward.

Then humanity clashed at the breastworks, and voices melted into a sort of hum, splashed with curses and weapons meeting.

Oaths from every one of that little group of islands in the grim North Sea mingled with the fighting gutturals of the valiant Sikh guards, dying for the honor of the salt they had eaten. And Bill Driver and his oldtime enemy of the chief commissioner's wharf found themselves side by side. They grinned at each other through sweat-cluttered faces and parried and thrust in a glorious spirit of comradeship. Yet the drunken degenerates prevailed. The defenders did not give way—they fought till they fell and died.

Over the souls of certain men who had been told off to do a certain clean deed with the few remaining shells in the revolvers spread a horror of that duty. These looked furtively at the women.

The sun rose over burning, blackened Port Blair and flushed at the screaming filth it lighted. Certain men agreed that the garrison could not last five minutes longer. These looked at each other; then they did not look at each other. They staggered toward the group of women and girls. Then——

She came round the point—a gray, lithe shape, cleared for action, her ensign snapping angrily. And as she came her guns smashed at the scum that had almost surged to its desire. Her boats dropped from the davits, and, loaded with armed marines, drove at the beach. The women had not been cheaply protected.

IN WAYS beyond my understanding, the pleading of Annie the first had prevailed against the precedent of regulation, and the captain of the cruiser had brought her, and Annie the second with her. That she was liable to imprisonment for conniving at her man's escape was a detail she ignored entirely.

She was the marrow-bone of Bill Driver's life, and, therefore, she knew that her place was by his side. And, searching frantically among the wounded and dead, she found him lying unconscious, across the body of the Sikh guard, among the carefully cultivated English flowers in the chief commissioner's garden. And while Annie the second ran for the doctor—over-busy with other wounded men — the marrow-bone took Bill's head on her lap and petted him back to consciousness.

Amid her kisses, he indicated the dead Sikh.

"He were a man, lass," he muttered. "I'm most sorry you hit him when we got away from 'ere—though we did need the rifle mortal bad."

Then the doctor came; and after a little while that doctor nodded slowly. And Annie the first, dry-eyed and beyond sobs, knew the meaning of it. The chaplain began the prayer he had so often used, but Bill interrupted. He could not see very clearly, but the haze clouding him was very different from the red haze of his passions.

" 'Scuse me, sir," he said weakly. "The doc says I'm dying?"

"Yes, my man," said the doctor.

The chaplain began to pray again.

"I want to speak to the chief commissioner," said Bill Driver.

The chief commissioner, his left arm in a sling and his head bandaged, leaned over Annie's shoulder.

"Yes, Driver—what is it?"

With a vast effort Bill saluted.

"You know abart me, sir—escaped convict?"

"Yes, my man, but that's all right. You have wiped the slate clean."

Bill smiled weirdly.

"Thank you, sir. There's a gent in London—Annie can tell him. But there's a Mister MacNeil—he's dead—he were a good man, and a minister." Bill gulped for breath. "I—I—I want him to know that I've paid the Government back."

"He knows now," said the chaplain.

"Yes, sir—I don't think you'd tell a lie. And Mr. MacNeil, he said the same thing. But—I don't know for myself. There may be a heaven, and all that. I'm going to find out in a few minutes."

"It's true," said the chaplain.

"Yes, sir—but I want Mr. MacNeil to know that I've paid the Government."

"He knows now," reiterated the chaplain.

Bill was silent. His brain had become strangely clear, and he was thinking as he had never thought before. Then——

"If I see Mr. MacNeil I can tell him,"

he said. "But that's only telling. S'pose he says 'Yes, Driver.' I won't know but what he's saying it to make me feel good. I won't be able to prove it."

He became silent again. The noise of the convicts being subdued came faintly to his ears. He saw his wife, his daughter, the doctor, the chaplain, and the chief commissioner, vaguely.

"What is it they give a feller when he pays a debt?" he asked suddenly.

His audience failed to understand him.

"You know, sir," he said directly to the chief commissioner. "Suppose you pays a bill; what is it the man gives you—the man you pays it to?"

"Oh—a receipt," said the chief commissioner.

Bill smiled happily.

"That's it. Please give me a receipt, sir, so I can show it to Mr. MacNeil, and he'll know I've paid the Government."

The chief commissioner answered huskily: "Very well, Driver."

He wrote on a page torn from his notebook; signed the writing and gave it to Annie the first.

"Read it, lass," whispered Bill.

And Annie read:

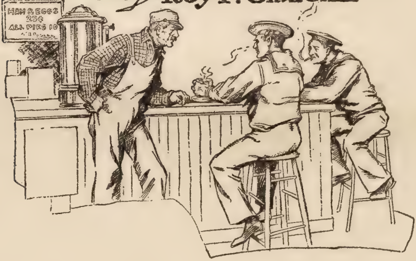
> This is to certify that William Driver, who escaped from the Andaman Islands after being sentenced for life thereto, returned of his own volition to those islands to warn the officials of an impending massacre; that, due to the effort of his warning, not a woman or child was killed or injured; that he fought most nobly in defense of the right; that he gave his life in that defense.
>
> And, by virtue of the authority invested in me as Governor of the Andaman Islands, I, George Furlong, do hereby release the said William Driver from the custody of the British Government—which Government has received full satisfaction for the debt William Driver once incurred.
>
> GEORGE FURLONG.

Bill's vast chest heaved with the pride of a work well done.

"Put it in my hand, lass," he whispered, "so I can take it with me, and show it to Mr. MacNeil."

Hereditary Evidence

by Roy P. Churchill



DAD REGAN stood with his hand on the wooden gate-latch and called a parting message to the motherly figure on the porch.

"Mebby today, mother, we'll get word."

"Yes, Jim," answered the other sadly. "It's been time. You be careful, Jim."

Dad Regan nodded assent and, opening the gate, started down the hill to the railroad station. A year had passed now since the brief message had come telling of the death of their son in the Navy. It had become a habit with the Regans to start every day with the hope that additional details would come, but despite their earnest old-fashioned letters, and all the inquiries they knew how to make, they received no news.

THE branch line that curved out into the coal district at Stanton, and struck the main overland track at Pennington, was barely fifty miles long. It boasted only one train a day, a mixed passenger and freight, on which the train crew were all called by their first names, and whose intimate family affairs were known to most all their passengers. The branch, however, owing to its heavy strings of coal-cars, boasted as fine a road-bed as any on the division and was tracked with ninety-pound rail.

When the big washout came in March, on the main line between Stanton and Pennington, the overland flyers were detoured over the "Coal Dust Division," as this fifty miles was nicknamed. Everything went all right until one of the big-train engineers, maybe trying to show off before the wondering natives who had come in to every station to see a real big train come in, took the high-ball through Summerset at regulation straight-track speed and piled up on a curve, the crookedness of which he had never dreamed.

Thanks to the steel coaches nobody was killed, but after that the master mechanic had one of the "Coal Dust" engineers go through in the cab of every train as a pilot.

The engineers of the Coal Dust Division were all old men, grown gray in the service and retired to this eddy of a great system to work out the years yet remaining between them and retirement on pension. Dad Regan was one of these. He sat on one of the high stools at the Railroad Lunch House at Stanton and sipped a cup of black coffee. He was waiting to pilot No. 3 over the troublesome division.

The morning air was cold and the coffee caused the old man's pinched figure to swell and thaw a little. His sparse hair was a little grayer than his short mustache which had once been brown, like his eyes. The hand on the heavy iron-china cup was wrinkled and vein-shaped but did not shake. As he blew the steam off his cup, and settled back on the hard stool, one caught the impression held by the company, that Dad Regan was a mighty dependable man; getting a little old maybe, but able to hold up his end yet and proud of it.

Jim Hundley and "Stubby" Nelson, of the light cruiser *Topeka*, bound overland from the Atlantic to the Pacific station, were awake and stirring, according to custom, at 5 A. M. Their whole beings demanded their shipboard morning coffee.

"Naw sah," apologized the porter, "there ain't no dinah yit. We don't pick it up till long 'bout nine."

"But we want coffee," complained the two sailors, and Hundley idly let two silver pieces strike together in his pocket.

"Well, sah," said the negro, his wits sharpened by the clink of the coins, "you-all might drap off de train at Stanton. We waits dar twenty minutes and sometimes a mite longer 'count ob dis here washout. Dar's a good coffee place near-by de track."

One of the coins made a hasty and safe journey and ten minutes later the two sailors hurried into the Railroad Lunch.

Dad Regan took a long look at the uniforms, started to speak a couple of times, but not until the sailors had finished one cup, ordered another, and turned to look at their surroundings, did he see their cap ribbons. Then he came forward a little timidly and asked a question.

"Are you two boys from the *Topeka* of the United States Navy?" He spoke a little huskily, as if under mental stress.

"Sure thing," spoke up Stubby Nelson. "Know anybody in the outfit?"

Dad Regan ignored the question and asked another.

"Did ye by any chance happen to be on her a year ago last May?"

"I was," he said, then waited, for there was a tenseness in the old man's tone which interested him.

"Then ye must have known my son Johnnie." Dad Regan spoke hopefully, as if an affirmative answer would be too good to be true.

"What's the last name? Maybe I did, I know 'em all."

"Regan. John Regan. He was killed, you know."

Hundley started to say something and Nelson kicked him. Dad Regan was speaking again.

"Yes, he was my boy, all that Ma and me had. He got the fever and just had to go. His letters was pretty blue too, wanted to come home. But I wouldn't humor him. Then there come the accident."

The old man paused a moment, and to hide his emotion pulled out his watch. Then he hurried on:

"Except for a notice from the Navy Department that he was dead, we have had no news at all. If ye knew him and know about the accident, I'd be obliged if ye told me. There's nearly twenty minutes before train time."

Stubby nodded and held out his left hand with two fingers gone.

"I got that in the same mix-up," he said, "and I knew Johnnie well. I'll tell you all about it."

Again Hundley started to speak and Nelson halted him.

"Let me do it, Jim. I was in Johnnie's division.

"Regan came aboard the *Panther* while I was a short-timer. I remember the morning well. A bunch of recruits came down to the South Atlantic on the *Prairie* to relieve the men going home. All the ship's company not on watch gathered around the port gangway to see what we'd get.

" 'There comes a likely youngster,' growled old Shorty Bray to me, and he meant Johnnie Regan. In less than a week we'd nicknamed him 'Johnnie Reb' on account of the way he said 'you-all' and ah'd all his r's. Pretty soon we cut that—called him J. R. for short."

"He wrote about it," smiled Dad Regan happily.

"Well, he made good," continued Stubby, "took the drill, and the eats, which were pretty bum after the *Prairie* left, and the kiddin', like a man ought to.

"ABOUT that time we were persuadin' Santo Domingo to be good, and the boat J. R. was in came in for an awful share of rough work. It would have sickened anybody that owned a streak of yellow as wide as a rope-yarn.

"I don't know why they do it, but a lot of recruits get the power-launch for their small-boat duty. J. R. was one. Deckhand in the crew of five men. Night and day, good weather and bad, that boat has to run. First thing at daybreak they have to hustle out to get provisions from shore, a quarter of bloody beef maybe, and two or three sacks of spuds; then along about nine the captain has to go ashore on official business, and boat and crew have to be spotless and smiling. Then there's the liberty parties and the mail and twenty other things which keep the launch crew humping themselves twenty hours a day. J. R. stood all this fine, and I want to say right here that if I had to have a steady job in a launch I'd desert tomorrow.

"After six months of it the first luff saw fit to put in somebody else and J. R. came on deck. That boy certainly was glad. He showed up the division in neatness with his clothes, and put on his shoes again, which no man ever needs in a launch.

"Then one morning one of the regular chain-tierers was sick and the boats'n's mate grabbed J. R., always in the way for a job, and put him in the chain-lockers. That was the morning we had to beat it out of our anchorage in a little place called Corpus Christi, to keep from piling up on the beach. The bay there is just a little cup-shaped affair and safe enough with an off-shore wind, but when one of those West India storms come up and it blows in from the old Caribbean, it's no place for a ship to spend any time.

"We were in a hurry to get out, of course, and were rolling around pretty lively. J. R. and a fellow named Shere were in the lockers. The anchor-chain was something awful to handle, covered with a kind of sticky blue mud, volcanic they call it, and things were in such a rush that we couldn't take time to wash it with a hose as it came over the side, which was customary.

"J. R. and his partner were making the best of a bad job when the ship gave a big roll and threw Shere down. He tried to scramble up but the slimy mud wouldn't let him get his feet under him.

"Left alone with the chain, J. R. did the best he could, but with the mud and roll of the ship some of that chain got away from him and went across Shere's legs. The two of them shouted for help. That's all they could do. Shere couldn't get out and with the chain still coming it would soon have him covered and crushed to death.

"In the noise on deck we didn't hear them. It was blowing like sin by then and everybody was working to save the ship. The first we knew J. R. came running on deck. A kink in the chain had made the man at the winch slack back a little and he took this flying chance to get on deck before we started to heave in again.

"There was only half a minute's delay, and the chain commenced to come in again before he could get to the boatswain. To make himself heard he jumped up on the taut chain and shouted to belay. Then it happened.

"The chain struck another snarl, the winch man threw on more power, and just at the short break at the hause pipe the chain parted. Poor J. R. caught the full snap of it. It threw him twenty feet and he struck on his head. Broke his neck. He died instantly trying to save a friend."

The sailor stopped. His story was ended. Dad Regan cleared his throat and with a voice betraying the effort to control it, asked:

"The other boy? Did they save him?"

Stubby shook his head.

"Too late," he said, and Hundley finished for him: "That's how Stubby lost his fingers, trying to get Shere out. Couple of fathoms of chain rolled them flat."

Dad Regan slowly took his feet from the rungs of the stool and stood up.

"I want to thank you two boys," he said still a little shakily. "I do wish that Mother could have heard, too. Ye couldn't stop over and tell her?"

He faced Stubby squarely and the two sailors could feel the almost piteous appeal in his eyes.

Hundley wavered. Stubby shook his head firmly.

"We have to report on time," he said. "Tell her for us. Tell her that all the boys thought a lot of Johnnie Regan."

"Thank ye both, then," said Dad resignedly. "I hear the Westbound comin' and I'll have to be goin'. I'll be ridin' with ye, but I'll be in the cab."

He spoke without boastfulness, yet with pride. In turn he grasped the two sailors' hands, and the three walked out.

"I probably won't see ye again," he said at the door, "but I'm mighty glad ye could tell me about Johnnie. Mother'll be glad, too."

Plainly unable to say more, he hurried from them. They saw him jump briskly to his place in the cab of the giant engine which was to take them over the Coal Dust Division. From the steps he waved a farewell.

"A fine old man," said Hundley as the two sailors walked to their coach. "But Johnnie certainly was a throw-back. What made you do what you did, Stubby?"

"I guess your first words answer that. He's a fine old man. I couldn't break his heart by telling him that his son was a low-down, miserable coward."

"You could have played ignorant, couldn't you?"

"And increase the old man's suspicions? Didn't you see that he was worried because nobody had ever written him the details? And besides, I for one have never been quite sure about Regan. All the ship ever had was what Shere said when he was half delirious, in the hour before he died."

"Wasn't that enough? What're you drivin' at? You know as well as I do that Johnnie Regan could have helped Shere out and got out himself if he hadn't had cold feet and deserted like a coward. Shere said so himself."

"Yes, I know all that, and again it might have happened just like I told the old man. Honest now, did he look like a man whose only son would have a yellow streak?"

"Johnnie looked good, too," argued the unconvinced Hundley. "His old man might have a streak of yellow as wide as a squilgee, waiting to crop out when you least expect it."

Stubby shook his head.

"I don't know, Jim. It might have been one way and it might have been the other. I did my best, anyway, for the old man, but I couldn't stand to stop over and tell the yarn again to the mother. The doubt's in my mind the same as it's in yours. She would have caught me."

FUEL could be had almost for the taking along the right-of-way of the Coal Dust Division, consequently the builders of the road economized in the deep cuts and great fills which make for easy grades, and used the coal. The road went up hill and down dale, and the great engines toiled laboriously up, spouting a cloud of black smoke from their stacks, or rolled ponderously down, with a roar of grinding brakes.

Dad Regan with his heavy string of sleepers, and mail and express coaches, stopped at the summit of Squirrel Ridge for orders. Below him was a long stretch of straight track. It led down into the valley and then up another ridge to the Honeycomb Mine. It was the custom for the engineers to "tear out a strip" going down in order to get a running start for the stiff grade ahead.

"All clear!" shouted the operator above the roar of the panting engine, as Dad Regan and his conductor came into the little office for their orders; and a few moments after Regan started his train down the hill.

This particular section of the division was one of its worst places. There was no switch in the valley between, and if a coal-car or an empty string got away from the busy yards of the Honeycomb, after a train had left Squirrel Ridge, they ran together at the bottom and smashed things up.

So far nothing serious had happened. Cars had run wild, and once the local had to back up the ridge in a hurry, but up until the day that Dad Regan started down with the Overland, there had been no wreck worth the name. Even the request of the roadmaster for a derailing switch had gone no further than permission for the preliminary grading.

As Dad Regan came roaring down, he kept his eyes constantly on the summit ahead. At the Ridge he had waited for a long coal-train to creep up and go safely into the clear. He knew that since the big trains were routed over this division that every precaution was being taken against an accident, but still he watched. As he reached the bottom, going fifty miles an hour, he looked away for a moment and hooked the big machine up another notch for the stiff climb ahead. When he looked out again the thing that he dreaded most of all had happened. His fireman saw it at the same time.

"Dad!" he shrieked. "Dad! Look at what's comin'!"

Dad had already looked. He shut off his power, opened the sand and jammed on the brakes. The heavy train, already taking the grade, slowed almost instantly. Seven loaded coal "gons" had broken away and were coming down the hill without a single man to set a hand-brake, even if that would have done any good.

"When she stops, jump, and uncouple the engine," ordered Dad.

The fireman looked at him questioningly. Dad picked up a wrench.

"Quick!" he commanded again, and the fireman hit the ground at the same time that the train came to a jerky, rumbling stop.

There were two other things that Dad Regan could have done—try to back his train out of danger up the hill behind him, or jump and save himself, and try to get the passengers out before the coal-train struck. Either of these two ways was dangerous to his passengers, and comparatively safe for himself.

The runaway was coming at such speed that Dad felt sure they could not get away by the first plan, and as for clearing the coaches of their human freight, it was out of the question, unless there had been ten minutes for every one that was available. There were babies, and invalids, and skeptics who would not leave their baggage, and Dad knew it. He took the only safe course to save his train, and had weighed the chances and made up his mind in the seconds while his hands were busy stopping his engine.

He shouted once more and brandished the wrench as his fireman hesitated over the automatic coupling. A moment more and the coaches commenced to roll gently away behind him, and he was free.

With the step of a man of thirty he sprang to his levers and started the big overland engine up the hill to meet the onrushing coal-cars. They were coming in a cloud of dust and with the rumble of a landslide. Dad's plan was to meet them head-on as far up the slope as he could, and let the heavy engine derail and wreck them. He must stand by too, for the engine must have speed and the grade was steep. From a standing start there was precious little time. Only an old hand—a master hand—could do it.

Five hundred yards up the grade the engine and the runaway met with a noise like the crash of a battery of turret-guns. The big engine, with sand grinding under its wheels, and the power necessary to haul its load across a continent loosed for destruction, scooped under the first coal-car, snapped the couplings and sent it spinning end over end down the embankment. With diminished speed it met the second, derailed it and crashed through its middle into the third. The following cars piled up on the mess, and the day was saved. The long string of passenger coaches lay safe in the valley.

Some of the passengers did not come out to see what had happened until the crash came, but Stubby and Hundley saw it all. They started with the train-crew in a run toward the wreck.

"What do you think of it now?" panted Stubby. "A man like that couldn't be the father of a coward."

Hundley didn't answer.

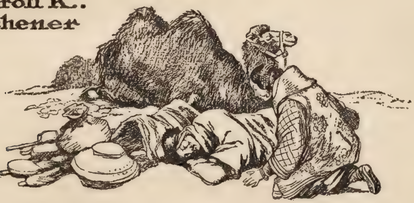
Ten minutes later they dug Dad Regan out of the freshly dug earth of the half-made derailing switch, poured water on him, and found him all right. He had jumped just at the last minute, and keeping his wits about him, had picked his place.

That night the two sailors stopped over after all. It was Hundley who told the story of Johnnie Regan to the eager ears of Johnnie's mother.

The Woman Of The Desert

by

Carroll K. Michener



THE man named Gilbertson, whom the natives called in their language "the honorable foreign-devil pill-doctor," peered into the deepening dusk at the swaying figures of three camels. He stood at the entrance of the Chinese innkeeper's stableyard, leaning slightly forward to balance himself against the blasts of a shrieking dust-storm.

The approach of the caravan had been the first incident worth speaking of throughout the long Winter day; though, if it comes to that, scarcely any day in Chinese Turkestan is characterized by incidents at all worth recording.

Gilbertson made out the figures of two persons in the caravan. As he watched, the howling desert wind of a sudden beat up against him with greater fury. It filled his eyes with dust and left him choking and sputtering. He rebuked it, as the Chinese stablemen always did, uttering strange Chinese oaths.

When he had regained his breath, the foremost camel had brushed past him into the stableyard and the second, mournful and reeking with the grime of the caravan-route, towered over him. He recovered his vision in time to register genuine surprise at the discovery that the rider of this second camel was a woman. Women do not often travel in Central Asia, much less Chinese women of the upper class, such as was this one, judging from her dress and the patrician character of her features.

A crowd of stablemen, camel-drivers and loafers surrounded the party as the camels knelt, groaning with relief to be rid of their riders.

At the command of her Chinese escort, the woman stumbled after the innkeeper into the gloomy interior of the inn and, so far as Gilbertson was concerned, interest in the incident ceased. He went wearily to the frosty interior of his own room, and shouted against its bare, dirty walls for his coolie. That individual, so much swarthier than the yellow of the Chinese that he might justly have been suspected of Mohammedan forebears, slouched into view from nowhere in particular, and made no comment as his master railed at him for failure to have the charcoal brazier burning. He had been with Gilbertson so many months that he no longer gave a thought to the eccentric demands of his master.

Fire enough to heat the room, indeed! With the desert wind sweeping into the place from a thousand crannies! Why didn't "the honorable foreign-devil doctor" do as the Chinese did—wrap himself in layer after layer of clothing to keep out the cold? Why waste fuel when there was warmth enough in the blood? These "foreign devils" were strangely prodigal and illogical people. Nevertheless the coolie made a show of complying, and soon had sufficient charcoal aglow to warm his master's blue hands.

Gilbertson sat and thought of the Chinese woman. There was little else to think of. He remembered suddenly that her feet were natural—unbound. She must, then, be no Chinese at all, but a Manchu.

Her face, as he had glimpsed it in the dusk, was attractive even to his Western eye. It had the high forehead and regular contour of the Northern Chinese. The nose was not the typical retroussé of the Orient, but almost Caucasian in proportions. Her color was a bleached olive, rather than a yellow—scarcely darker than the color of a sunburned brunette of the Western Hemisphere.

Her clothes were richly embroidered. They were of unusual character for a traveler on these distant roads.

Vong, the interpreter, who had become head caravan man since his master learned to speak Chinese effectively, came in and squatted on his heels beside the brazier. Gilbertson offered him Russian cigarettes, but Vong shook his head.

"What's the matter with you, Vong-ski?" Gilbertson asked in surprise. "Homesick again?"

Vong smiled faintly but made no direct reply.

"This is very far from home," he said. "My wife, you know, will have another baby soon. It is very cold here." And Vong edged closer to the faint glow of the charcoal.

Gilbertson looked at the Chinese with mingled disgust and suspicion.

"See here, now," he said severely. "Don't you work yourself up into a funk. Why, Lord Buddha, man! If you desert me now look where I'll be at! You can't do it, that's all. I won't listen to it."

Vong looked funereally sober but said nothing.

"How long before we can start?" asked Gilbertson bruskly, after a few thoughtful puffs at his cigarette.

Vong shrugged his shoulders and murmured—

"Ten days."

"Ten days! You're mad as the Hunghutzes. We must start in five at the most."

"Not enough camels. We must send for them to the next town."

"Nonsense. I saw forty in the market today."

"There are plenty, but their owners will not sell. They ask too much."

"How many have you now?"

"Only four, master."

"Four will do if we can't get more."

"Four for the desert road to Khotan?" And Vong held up his hands in reproachful denial. "It is a journey of thirty days. We could take only half enough water."

"But there will be ice in the water-holes at this season until we get well into the desert, and even then we can dig for water in many places. The yamen people all say so, from the governor down to the runners."

Vong shook his head.

"These people who came in tonight—where are they going? To Khotan also, aren't they?"

Vong nodded.

"They are two, and they have three camels. We are three and we have four camels. Enough for us, Vong-ski, eh?" coaxed Gilbertson.

But Vong continued to shake his head. There had been a time when he resented the entirely foreign and irrelevant "ski" on the end of his surname, but now he was indifferent. Plainly he was homesick for the flat green country of the central Chinese plains, the land thickly populated with the houses of the living and the mounds of the dead. He was thinking, too, of the bright lights of metropolitan Shanghai, and of the little house on Sinza Road, where his young wife was about to give birth to another baby. Perhaps a boy!

And so Vong Tze-miao was in no mood

for thirty days of the desert—thirty days of hardship and imminent danger in the great, trackless Talka-makan. Why did this foreign pill-seller want to go to Khotan anyhow? Incomprehensible to the practical Chinese mind. It was to see the desert, to dig for old bits of pottery and wooden tablets in sand-buried desert cities, said the pill doctor. Impossible ever to comprehend these queer foreigners, who wished to risk their lives and those of their servants for nothing.

"In five days the post will be here from Lanchow. Perhaps we can have a couple more camels by that time. At any rate we start then. Do you hear me, Vong?"

Vong shook his head but made no further protest.

"By the way, what have you found out about these people who came tonight?" asked Gilbertson.

"Nothing," answered Vong as if to dismiss the subject.

"Vong-ski, that's old stuff. Come, out with it. Every man in the place except me knew their whole history five minutes after they arrived. I'll bet on that. Is she his wife?"

Vong nodded.

"Number one wife?"

"Number two," replied Vong laconically.

"Oh, a concubine, eh? Did he buy her?"

Vong gave way to his natural Chinese instinct for gossip, and began with interest to tell what he knew.

"THERE is an old Kashgar tea-merchant here who has just come from Peking. One evening the old merchant, Yolban Khan, strolled in the Imperial City, just outside the walls of the Forbidden City. He became confused in a certain district where the streets are small, and found himself in a narrow alley beside the wall of a magistrate's garden. The place must have been very beautiful within, judging from what he could see in the twilight through a small lattice. But scarcely had he put his eyes to the opening for a better glimpse, than the face of a woman appeared on the inner side. He looked long at her, for she was handsome.

"'Go away, old man,' she said to Yolban Khan. 'It is not you I want.'"

Vong laid aside his water-pipe and took one of Gilbertson's Russian cigarettes.

"That is why," he resumed, gesturing significantly toward the part of the inn where the newcomers were quartered, "that is why Yolban Khan knows of this woman."

"Well, go on," urged Gilbertson. "You Chinese are maddening tale-tellers. It takes you so long to get to the meat of the thing."

"Yolban Khan," continued Vong, smiling, but not in the least hurrying, "went on a few paces, but so great was the woman's beauty that his footsteps lagged. And Yolban Khan is an old man! He had not gone far when the narrow street seemed to be filled of a sudden with a big sedan chair and a knot of coolies. Out of the chair bounded a young man who first looked in through the lattice where the old man had gazed and then ran to a gate that opened for him.

"Yolban Khan heard the voices of the young man and the woman beyond the wall, and rejoiced in the boldness of youth that thus with a fiery spirit defied the Confucian law of love-making. But at that moment came still a greater knot of men, who grappled with the coolies and silenced them. Some went through the gate, and there followed cries and shrieks from the woman. These ended and the men came out carrying the woman and leading the young man. There was the look of death on the woman's face, but she had ceased to cry out. They closed the gate in the wall and carried the woman away swiftly.

"Long after she was gone the young man stared after her, struggling with his captors. Yolban Khan regretted his age, which prevented him from striking and slaying in response to the call for blood that gleamed in the young man's eyes. But they led him away, too—the young man—who sank listlessly into the sedan chair. As the chair passed Yolban Khan, crouching close against the wall, the old man gave a start and rubbed his eyes to make sure he was not mistaken, for he saw that the young man's official cap-button was of the imperial yellow!

"Yolban Khan is not unaccustomed to the life of the imperial capital. He knew the captors of the young man to be eunuchs from the imperial household, because of the garments they wore. One of the eunuchs spoke to the old man sharply, but Yolban Khan was able to excuse his presence. The eunuch, thinking no doubt to overcome the old countryman with awe at his part in the adventure, whispered to him:

" 'You see—the one in the chair? He is the young Emperor!'

"Yolban Khan believed. For there have been many tales of the young Emperor's escapades by night, away from the Forbidden City. He is the Emperor, yet he is the plaything of the 'Old Buddha'—the Empress Dowager. She does what she will with him. He is her slave."

"But why should she have interfered with the young Emperor's love-making?"

Vong shrugged his shoulders.

"Yolban Khan says the woman's father was banished by imperial decree on the day following. Very likely the 'Old Buddha' feared an intrigue with the young Emperor."

"This is all you know of the story?"

"This is all, master. There is nothing more."

Gilbertson watched the little caravan get under way in the dawn. He saw the sad-eyed woman come from the cheerless inn and mount the waiting camel.

By Gilbertson's side in the throng of stablemen and inn-loafers stood the man called Yolban Khan, Kashgar tea-merchant, and as the woman settled herself to the seat her eyes rested upon him for a moment in a glance that lengthened into a stare. Speaking almost as if in a dream she murmured:

"Go away, old man. It is not you I want."

II

AT NIGHTFALL, on the twenty-sixth day in the desert, Gilbertson sat on the crest of a great hill of sand and watched Vong, the coolie and the camel-driver who were digging feverishly at the foot of the dune. The three men took turns at the digging, and the one who now wielded the shovel stood waist-deep in the hasty excavation.

"Any sign yet?" Gilbertson shouted.

Vong, coming up to be relieved, scrambled to the top of the dune holding out a handful of moist sand. Gilbertson felt of it with satisfaction, but Vong looked hollow-eyed disappointment.

"We must dig very deep," he said, shaking his head.

Gilbertson surveyed the limitless reaches of sand-crests stretching away to every point on the horizon. They were almost mountainous here—the highest that had been encountered—gathering into great east and west ridges, like mountain-chains, at intervals of little over a mile. Sometimes, as on this last day, the steep slopes of these ridges had made it almost impossible for the camels to cross. Their progress had been scarcely a dozen miles since sunrise.

Vong gazed, too, at the sand sea darkening under the slow twilight, and then looked at Gilbertson in a silent reproach.

"—— it!" shouted Gilbertson when his eyes rested once more on those of the Chinese. "Don't look at me that way! You give me the willies."

Vong slid down the sand-slope without a word and stood eagerly over the edge of the deepening hole.

As he watched the three below him Gilbertson felt that they were discussing him. There was a manner of hostility in the covert glances they cast upward toward him as they spoke.

A wind blew more coldly upon him there at the crest of the dune, and he shivered at the thought that tonight there would be no fire in camp. They had passed the last outposts of the dead tamarisk trees that linger far into the desert—age-old tombed sentinels of the period when the sand-waste was watered and fertile.

The digger's head was out of sight now, and Gilbertson scrambled down to share in the toil. Crumbling walls made it necessary to widen the opening of the pit and the digging went on with painful slowness.

The sand thrown up from the bottom still was moist but seemed to grow no moister. Last night they had been compelled to dig eight feet before they reached water. Then the mud stratum, that might have been the bed of a buried stream, yielded only enough to half fill the water-bags. For the almost exhausted camels there was nothing.

When they had been at work nearly three hours, and the pit had reached a depth of fourteen feet, they gave up the quest and threw themselves on the sand. There was no hope that water could be reached here by digging. The desert wind shrieked bitterly at them with its breath of frost, as they lay panting from their disappointed effort.

After a time they rose and with one accord went to the water-bags, still unslung from the wearied camels. There was enough for tonight but none for tomorrow. The ice-bags, too, carried for days from the last outpost of fertility, were almost empty. There was enough, perhaps, for another day's march.

One by one the men drew cupfuls of muddy water from the pathetically limp water-bags. There still was enough for tea to be made over the alcohol burner. They ate their evening meal in silence.

Gilbertson rolled himself in his sleeping-sack and lay down on the sand floor beneath his tent, and for a time listened to the low voices of his men, trying vainly to make out the trend of their earnest colloquy. It was easy enough to guess, and the realization of it made him pull his revolver from its holster and look at its chambers. He had anticipated some such crisis and was prepared for it.

Vong came into the tent, without apology for intruding upon his master's privacy—something he had never done before. Gilbertson slipped out of his sleeping-bag and the two confronted each other, squatting on their heels under the low canopy.

"Tomorrow we go back," announced Vong.

Gilbertson laughed, a very dry and mirthless laugh.

"Go back? You're crazy! The only thing we can do is to go on."

"No water," muttered Vong sullenly.

"There may be water tomorrow—we must find it. We can't be more than two days from the Keriya River, and then there'll be plenty of it."

But Vong only shook his head.

"The coolie and the camel-driver—they will not go further. They will go back."

Gilbertson pulled the revolver from its holster and examined it meaningly.

"They will not go back, Vong," he said in a low voice. "Look here," he continued, putting away the gun when he saw how little effect it had upon the demeanor of the sullen Vong. "We haven't enough food to last until we get back. And the camels couldn't stand it. They're nearly exhausted now. We've been out twenty-six days, and every desert-traveler since Marco Polo agrees that it's only a thirty-day trip. We can hold out for two or three days more even without water. And we're sure to find plenty of it by digging when we're nearer the river. There's nothing for it but to go on, Vong."

"Water—no water," was all Vong would say in reply.

And Gilbertson turned from him in disgust. These Chinese were children when it came to anything like a crisis demanding hardship and fortitude against known danger.

When Vong had gone Gilbertson drew out the worn volume of Marco Polo's travels that had been the inspiration of his venture into the desert, if there had been anything like inspiration for it. He turned to the passage in the immortal work that tells of the great "Desert of Lop."

Even to handle the volume was a refreshing assurance. True, the Ser Marco had not crossed this part of the desert, but deserts were much alike. What was true of Polo's "Desert of Lop" would be sufficiently true here. There were many who crossed the Takla-makan. He would by no means be the first, though the route was little known and much feared.

One could not go wrong, knowing the direction and possessing the strength, Gilbertson thought. In four days more, five at the most, he should reach the southern edge of the desert, the goal of his expedition. Khotan was the city from which he hoped to make his explorations into the sand-buried habitations of dead centuries.

Gilbertson was an adventurer who looked to adventure as its own reward and its only aim. If he discovered a buried city it would not be to enrich archæology or geography. He was not greatly interested in filling the Smithsonian Institution with new treasures. He was interested only in finding diversion for Yoland Gilbertson, who claimed no home but the world at large, and who was bound by no ties save those of the universal kinship.

It was this vagueness of purpose and utter absence of serious intent that had prompted him to leave Harvard in the midst of his work for a master's degree and sail for Europe on a cattle-boat.

A personal interest, but no particular purpose, had led him to spend weeks in the slums and among the docks of Liverpool. Stevenson's "Adventures with a Donkey," strangely enough, had inspired him to a mendicant jaunt through Germany and France, living, as he put it, "on the staff of the universal brotherhood." What impulse had led him to Mexico he never was able to say definitely, but the spy duty he undertook for a certain revolutionist general had its climax in front of a gray adobe wall at daybreak in the Mexican capital, with an attaché of the American embassy dashing up to the executioners' squad just in time to halt an unnecessarily violent flight of Mauser bullets.

Various parts of South America had claimed him briefly and to no particular purpose, save once, to assist United States army officers in cleaning up a fever district. For this he was nearly rewarded with death from the disease he fought. In Alaska he had found gold, but resigned it to a woman whose crippled father held a barren claim next to it. The woman had wanted to marry him, but he had no such notion—never had such an idea at any time in his life—so he went to a place as near as possible the antipodes.

It was not surprising that, finding himself in Shanghai and without funds, he should have offered to sell pills for an American patent-medicine company. The manager of the concern sent him forth in the middle of the cholera and dysentery season to canvass the villages of the flat, reeking Yangtze basin.

Gilbertson came back in a few weeks with a creditable knowledge of Chinese, an unimpaired constitution and tremendous profits from the pills. Under the influence of his oratory on street corners and in temple yards the natives had bought his wares for all ills. These marvelous pellets would cure anything! Strangely, they did seem to work miracles. The lame and the halt and the disease-stricken had seemed to become whole under the "foreign magic-pills."

On his next excursion Gilbertson was sent further afield. He tired of the rôle of healer, and finding himself in the remote western provinces of China determined to desert his employers and march away over the deserts and mountains of Central Asia, along the route of the great Marco Polo and on to the almost obliterated threshold of the back door of Europe.

Gilbertson put away the volume of Marco Polo, blew out the candle, and, fingering the holster of his revolver to give himself a greater feeling of security, composed himself for sleep.

THIS hands were pinioned as in vises when he came to a sudden, startled awakening. His three companions stood over him threateningly, and Vong was unstrapping the holster of the revolver.

Gilbertson struggled vainly, then ceased. They let him up and all four scrambled from the tent. Outside they stood silently, defiantly, under the cold desert stars, with the sand-murmuring blasts of the great waste shrieking through them.

"We go now—back to the last water-hole," announced Vong triumphantly. "Then one man goes on with the strongest camel for more food—more camels."

"You can go and be —— to you," Gilbertson snarled at them. "I'll stay. I'll keep going the other way—south. You yellow vermin! A thousand curses on all your ancestors!"

Gilbertson's rage and impotence gave him a sort of giddy feeling. The air seemed full of lights and noises. He wondered if he were becoming suddenly ill. Then he thought of the evil spirits with which superstitious natives people the desert, and laughed until his voice stirred disturbing echoes.

A passage from the book of Marco Polo seemed to stand out before his eyes: "Sometimes stray travelers will hear as it were the tramp and hum of a great cavalcade of people away from the real line of road, and taking this to be their own company they will follow the sound; and when day breaks they find that a cheat has been put on them and that they are in an ill plight. Even in the daytime one hears those spirits talking. And sometimes you shall hear the sound of a variety of musical instruments, and still more commonly the sound of drums. Hence in making this journey 'tis customary for all travelers to keep close together——"

Gilbertson laughed again in a voice that caused his companions to glance at one another with a curious significance. Then he went into the tent, wrapped himself into his sleeping-bag and tossed in a feverish slumber until daybreak.

His companions were gone, he found, as he left the tent. So were all but one of the camels—the poorest of the lot—and this one gazing with a patient yearning in the direction his fellows had taken. Food enough to last three or four days had been left for him, and a small cake of ice. He marveled at this human justice of the sand-sea mutineers.

For an hour Gilbertson hesitated over which course to take. Should he acknowledge himself beaten and set out to follow his companions, or should he push on into the unknown?

The devil spirits of the desert, of course, were about him, whispering to be off—to follow them into the waste. In the end he yielded and went their way southward, climbing laboriously up the slopes of the great sand ranges, and at every crest struggling against new disappointment at the unchanging character of the landscape. He must walk now, leading the camel, for the poor beast, weakened by his long fast, was sufficiently burdened with the meager camp equipment.

Through the long day Gilbertson staggered, and when night came he found himself too weary for digging. Half the precious ice went for his tea, and when he had eaten he slept in a stupor of exhaustion.

Before dawn he was awake and had selected a low gully between two towering dunes for his digging. He found then that his companions had taken the only spade, so he was compelled to sacrifice the alcohol-burner for conversion into a rude scoop. He began an agony of labor that lasted for hours, with only bitterness and exhaustion for reward. The sand at six feet showed but a slight trace of moisture.

A sort of calm resignation succeeded the first panic of disappointment. Gilbertson was able to whistle a few bars of the latest popular song that had been going the rounds of the Shanghai music-halls before he left on this trip; but the whistling only aggravated his thirst. He approached the silent, wistful camel and looked into the beast's hopeless eyes.

"Not much longer for this world, are you, old boy?" Gilbertson could not help saying aloud.

The sound of his voice, so many hours silent, startled him. A faint echo came from the sand-dunes, and he looked up, half expecting to glimpse somewhere another human. The mute sand-crests, stretching in endless confusion, rebuked his thought.

It was with difficulty that he got the camel to his feet. The beast seemed to have given up the fight. His vitality was gone. He soon would be a part of the inanimate void about him.

Gilbertson pitied the animal and would have given him the brotherly caress a man gives his horse had not a leering curl of the lips warned him the camel probably would maintain his attitude of vicious repugnance toward humans even in the shadow of death. Those foul teeth must still keep the two from the intimate companionship of common danger.

They swayed slowly through the trackless sand, animate derelicts mutually repugnant but mutually dependent for life itself. The gray sky seemed to creep down upon them, and the wind seemed to mock them with its spiteful buffetings of drifted sand.

Gilbertson had let his watch run down, but he had little need of it. His eyes were for the needle of his compass, and for a sign of relief in the still unchanging southern horizon. Time was of no consequence. For him space was the only dimension, water the only element that mattered.

Toward the middle of the afternoon the camel faltered near the top of a dune steeper than any they had encountered before, and slid feebly backward into the gully. With a moan of infinite melancholy he stretched his gaunt neck along the sand and lay still. Though Gilbertson beat and kicked at him, then spoke to him softly in the words of Turkoman camel-drivers, the beast would not respond.

Gilbertson lay down in the sand, his face on his arms, and tried to think. It had always been his theory that the mind is stronger than the body. The mind must find a way where the body could not.

He reviewed the course of the whole expedition, counted over the number of days they had been on the march, the estimated number of miles traveled; he went over in mind all the road lore of the desert that he had picked up in the city at the edge of the sand-sea, and reasoned that the sum of it could not have led him astray. Truly, unless the compass was wrong, or the earth altered, or the sun and stars changed in their courses, he must, if he kept on, come to the southern edge of the desert. To go back—well, that was impossible now. He must go on, as long as his strength held out. That was the only solution. He must go on.

Strength seemed to fill him—the strength of desperation. He sprang up, fumbled feverishly among the camp equipment on the fallen camel for the small quantity of food he must take, and the remainder of the ice. It required tremendous force of will to keep from consuming the whole of the pitifully small lump of frozen treasure in a single orgy of gratification. But he crunched only a little.

Gilbertson did not look back at the dying camel as he reached the crest of the dune and slid down into the opposite gully. His haste was too great. He was devoid of sentiment. He had neither pity, nor remembrance, nor any emotion. There was nothing in his mind save the compelling desire to consume the one dimension that was of any consequence. There was but one goal, one aim in life, one thing of value—water.

He was not conscious of sand-hills or of suns. Presently the stars were out but he did not seem aware of it. He kept on, toiling, panting, reeling through the night.

This could not continue endlessly. He faltered at last near the top of a steep dune, as the camel had done, and fell back, sliding helplessly to the bottom. He tried again, but exhaustion overcame him in the attempt and he did not rise from the gully this time, but remained, sprawling, face upward to the stars. Then he slept.

The sun and his thirst awoke him. He did not seem to feel the cold, though in it was the chill of frost. Dazedly he felt for the ice, and in a delirium of haste crunched the last of his small treasure. When he saw that it was gone a sober fear overcame him. He reviled himself for having eaten it, and threw himself down with his face in the sand. There was almost childishness in the petulance of his grief.

But the precious liquid had given new life to his blood, and restored some of his strength. He ate something and began to stumble on, ever southward.

At nightfall his thirst was agonizing. His lips were parched and his tongue swollen. He was hungry, but he could not eat. Food choked him; he could not swallow.

He began digging at the bottom of a gully. In the intervals of utter exhaustion and sleep that overcame him at times he continued digging through the night. At dawn he had made a hole six feet deep. The sand was moist but he knew that to find water it would be necessary to go many feet deeper.

Sitting on the edge of his dry water-hole a thought came to him suddenly and made him rage hoarsely at the sky. Why had he not drunk the blood of the dying camel?

Then he ceased his shrieking at the sky and wondered if he were going mad.

He decided to die, peacefully, respectably, and looked about him for a sand-crest that would be a fitting monument. When he had chosen one he climbed to the top of it and disinterestedly surveyed the sand-sea.

Afterward it seemed to him that he had gazed for some time at an object below him on the southern slope of the dune before he realized in the least what it was. He was aware that it was a dead camel long before he perceived the significance of it. Then, dully, the thought came to him that it was his own camel, and that he had made his way back to it through some sickening error in the compass or in his reading of the stars.

But when he had rolled nearer to the object he saw that it was not his camel. The wind had driven the stench of it away from him during the night but could not protect him now. He was nauseated and his illness for a time robbed him of the strength to crawl away.

The sun shone full in his eyes, yet there seemed to him to be a great grayness over everything. Through this grayness he gazed at a bit of curious silver inlay in the saddle of the fallen camel, and managed to crawl close to it in a childish fit of curiosity.

His reward was the ghastly discovery that behind the camel's body was that of a man—unmistakably the Chinese official of Khotan who had gone into the desert with his Peking concubine. In the dead hands was clutched a carbine, the muzzle of which now was poked impotently into the sand. Across the man's face was dried a streak of blood.

In Gilbertson's eyes the grayness increased and then became utter darkness.

III

IN THE outlaw village nestling along fertile banks of an out-cropping of the desert-buried river, there had been tremendous excitement all morning. The foreign man the wild-camel hunters had brought in yesterday was "alive" again, and the Chinese woman, whose husband they had shot and afterward robbed, sat by the man's side talking in a strange language. She had ceased to cry out for death when she saw him, and now wept gently as she talked.

The language Gilbertson and the Chinese woman spoke was German. She had addressed him in German because he was a foreigner and that was the language she had learned when her father was on foreign service for the old Empress. He was able to reply in German with what knowledge he had gained of it in his vagabondage, though each would have understood the other better in mandarin.

"What is this place?" asked Gilbertson weakly, when she had somewhat dried her tears.

"It has no name," answered the woman. "The people are outlaws—they dare not leave the desert."

"How did they happen to find me—by the way, what happened to you two, out there?" pointing to the desert.

"They shot him," she shuddered. "My camel ran away with me, but they caught him, and brought me here. The *Amban* was not killed, but fired at them from behind his camel until they left. They are great cowards. The chief, when he heard of it, made them return. The *Amban* was dead, then, and they found you there, almost dead too."

"What will they do with us?"

"The old chief is sick. He fears death. Perhaps if you give him medicine he will let you go."

"What will become of you?"

"The foreign gentleman knows what will become of me—he knows well."

Her look of graven resignation disturbed him.

"You mean you will become a slave to one of them?"

The woman nodded and fixed her eyes on the dirt floor of the hut.

A group of villagers who had stood open-mouthed about the pile of matting upon which Gilbertson lay, were thrust aside by a man who appeared to be one in authority. He was a tall, powerful Mongol, with keen, intelligent eyes. Clearly he was not of the inferior breed of Turkoman camel-hunters about him.

"Zahid Beg, the chief," he said to Gilbertson in the Kansu dialect, "desires your attendance. Can you walk, or must you be carried?"

"I think I had better be carried into his royal presence," replied Gilbertson, though there was no such levity in his tone as in his words.

They picked him up and in a few paces set him down in a hut larger than the others, before the emaciated form of an old man.

"Medicine!" demanded the sick man in a dialect that had to be translated. "Give me medicine."

Gilbertson well knew that to the heathen all white men are doctors. He had no medicine save half a dozen capsules of quinine and a handful of the despised pills he had sold consciencelessly for all known ills and all unknown. Still, he thought, it might be well to experiment with the old man. Gratitude, perhaps, would give him his freedom from what otherwise might be perpetual servitude.

"What is the reward if I make you well?" he asked of the old chief.

The Mongol muttered hoarsely and drew the edge of his hand across his throat.

"If you do not—" he threatened savagely.

But the old chief looked more kindly upon the captive.

"Cure me," he said, "and you shall have what you ask: a garden, a house, a wife—though of women there are few. You shall choose from among them."

The promise did not give Gilbertson great satisfaction, but he thought he saw in it some advantage. With all the impressiveness he could muster he took the old man's pulse, looked into his eyes, examined his tongue, moved his arms up and down as if in first aid for the drowning—and then drew forth the pills. Rolling one into his palm, he muttered over it solemnly the opening lines of Virgil's Æneid, and then popped it into the old man's mouth.

With greater assurance even than the haughty Mongol, Chang Ssu-yeh, Gilbertson disdained the carriers who had brought him into the hut and strode forth to his own.

For three days the village paid homage to him, though Chang scowled over it. He ate of the fat of the oasis. Each day he went with pomp and circumstance to the chief's hut and administered a pill. On the third day the chief arose, walked from the hut, and announced himself not only cured but refilled with the fires of youth.

What a testimonial, thought Gilbertson, this would be for the pill company if he could but work it up into ad copy!

The Zahid Beg's first official act was to proclaim a public banquet in honor of the great medicine man. At this banquet Gilbertson was plied with so much honor it wearied him. The climax came when the old chief announced Gilbertson's reward for raising him from a sick bed.

"The honorable pill-doctor," said the Beg, "shall have one of the finest melon gardens. He shall dwell among us forever as our brother, and he shall be a headman of the village. For his wife he shall take the woman from the desert, who comes also from distant peoples, and knows his manner of speech. I have said—so must it be."

There were only two at the banquet-board who did not join in the uproar of applause. They were Gilbertson and Chang Ssu-yeh. Gilbertson did not notice Chang's glowering silence, for he was too busy with anxious solicitude over himself. Nevertheless, with Chang for interpreter, he made dignified response and accepted the chief's generosity. It was impossible to do less.

In three days, the old chief announced further, would the nuptials take place. On the morrow a house would be built to shelter the bride. In the meantime, to respect the proprieties, the woman from the desert would be housed with the chief's own family. Let there be great rejoicing and a general holiday.

Gilbertson strode away from the ruins of the feast to refresh himself with air and with contemplation. He still was too much of a curiosity to go unaccompanied by a trail of urchins and dogs, but he had lived in the East long enough to become accustomed to finding his needed solitude in entire indifference to encompassing crowds of the curious.

He strolled through the straggling village farther than he had gone before, and was surprised to see the extent of ruined structures, half covered with sand, that spoke eloquently of buried generations. From his knowledge of the sand-smothered cities of the desert, and the fabulous stories told of the romance and the richness of them, Gilbertson recognized in this extensive reach of ruin what probably was a city of many thousand inhabitants. The treacherous and inconstant river probably had shifted its stream to another bed and left the city to the fate of parching winds and drifting sands. Now it was back again and feeding this colony of outlaws into renewed semblance of the city it once destroyed.

Desiccated timbers, impossible to say how old, protruded from the sand—the gaunt skeletons of houses. There were excavations among many of the ruins, showing how the present inhabitants had made effort to learn the secret and reap the abandoned spoil of the dead city.

There were two persons loitering among the buried houses, Gilbertson discovered, other than the collection of children and himself. Following him at some distance was Chang Ssu-yeh, and in advance of him, unaware yet of his presence, was the Chinese woman of the desert. He caught up with her, and when she had overcome the cultivated shyness of all Chinese women in the presence of men he told her the old chief's decree.

At first she looked at him incredulously, with black eyes round and wide in surprise. Then a pink flush spread under the delicate olive of her skin and her eyes dropped with her averted face.

"Pretty tough for you, isn't it?" he said, speaking in the classical language with words that expressed as nearly as possible the terseness of the Anglo-Saxon.

She looked up quickly with an apprehensive expression. Her features, more mobile by far than those of any other Chinese woman he had known, registered plainly a growing alarm. With a start he understood, and returned rather evasively, her gaze that was filled now with more than doubt—a gaze full of the tragic resignation that marks the life and entombs the hopes of the Orient's women.

She thought:

"The white man does not wish to marry me. But I wish to marry him. He is better than these camel-drivers. I must kill myself if he does not."

He thought:

"By all the gods, Buddha, the woman wouldn't mind marrying me! She doesn't like the idea of tying up with one of these dirty camel thieves for life. But I can't marry her. It would be something of an adventure, but I couldn't have a flock of little half-breeds trailing around at my heels."

As they continued to gaze into each other's eyes she was thinking with a bitterness of heart:

"He will not marry me. I am a yellow woman to him. He does not know that I am proud, too, like all Chinese women. And I am better than Chinese—I am Manchu. My people would say it is a disgrace for me to marry a white man. Besides, I am not beautiful like the foreign women. He could not love me."

But this is what he was thinking:

"She is a beautiful woman. I have been too long away from women. She makes my heart beat faster. Why not? If I knew whether we could escape——"

The woman heard the sound of footsteps in the yielding sand and turned her head so that the jade pendants from her ears swung sharply against her cheeks. She saw Chang Ssu-yeh standing near them in the group of staring urchins. Gilbertson looked toward him without welcome.

Chang scattered the urchins out of hearing distance and came nearer.

"We can escape," he confided to them.

"How?" asked Gilbertson, troubled by the expression of the woman's eyes.

"There must be gifts and silks for the wedding, and we have nothing here. I go for it. The wedding must wait. The old chief has said. It is only six days to the great caravan route."

"Are you going alone?"

"Two men go with me. The camels will halt beyond the first great ridge of dunes and wait until midnight. You must come to us there—you and the woman."

"But they will follow us. Are you well armed?"

"There are guns here, but only a little ammunition. The chief has it and guards it as his life. He will give me enough for safety, but the woman must bring the rest. She must find it. Besides, we shall take the best of the camels. Chang Ssu-yeh will see to that."

The three stood expectantly silent.

"Tomorrow?" asked Gilbertson.

"Tomorrow."

Gilbertson found it easier to decide if he looked away from the fear in the woman's face.

"It would be best to take a chance," he thought. "She will be safe in any event."

The woman, with clearer penetration of motive than the man, was thinking:

"I am lost. The Mongol desires me and will take me. Yet I must go since the white man wills it. Perhaps if I yield the Mongol will not kill——"

And Chang, behind the yellowed-bronze mask of his immobile features, thought simply this:

"It will be easy to cut the fool of a white man's throat as he sleeps."

IV

GILBERTSON and the woman stumbled through the frozen gravel-paths leading to the first rows of sand-dunes, pausing at intervals to look back, breathlessly, to see if they were pursued. It had seemed a forlorn hope, this escape, so closely were they under the surveillance of the curious villagers with whom they lodged. Gilbertson had not found it easy to slip away until long after midnight, and then he could take with him little that would be of service on a long trip through the Winter desert.

For the woman it was still less easy, and she came pitifully unprepared for the journey, yet clutching fearfully in her wide sleeves a collection of cartridge-boxes that it had been her assigned task to find. She would not let him relieve her of the burden, so Gilbertson put his arm about her slender shoulders as the best means of assisting her. She looked up at him, startled, when she felt the pressure of the arm, then lost her shyness in a breathless laugh. She seemed to be developing new characteristics — becoming a new creature — here in the wild freedom of the desert wastes.

They had reached the dunes and were picking their way carefully eastward. From the top of each sand-eminence Gilbertson looked for the light that should guide them to the waiting caravan.

For an hour they toiled on, the woman's weary feet lagging and demanding frequent rest. She seemed to lean with more confidence now upon his arm, and with a greater abandon. He was keenly conscious of it, too, and it gave him a sense of proprietorship commingled with a certain aggressive, protective feeling less easy to name. He looked down upon the knob of smooth, black hair that came just to his shoulder and now and then rested wearily but caressingly against it.

Perhaps he was a fool to be leaving the desert oasis. For leaving there meant leaving her, of course, though she was going with him. In the desert village it would not have been impossible—the old chief's vision of a house, a garden and in the midst of it the woman of mystery from the desert. But out in the wide world—well, one must always be thinking of going home some time for the remainder of one's days, and one can not go home with a Chinese wife. And if he have a conscience he can not leave the Chinese wife—and the children.

There had been many women in Gilbertson's life, but they had been as ships that pass in the night. He had boasted of his lack of susceptibility. So there was little excuse for him when, as they saw the caravan light at last from the top of a sand-dune, he kissed the Chinese woman on the lips and held her in an embrace to which she yielded wonderingly.

Gilbertson discovered that a kiss eliminates a woman's creed, race and color, and leaves only sex. The spontaneity of his action and the warmth of her response disturbed him, and he stood away from her almost coldly. A dozen paces away he saw Chang, who had come out impatiently to meet them. Chang had watched them there on the summit of the dune, outlined against a cold moon, and his lips framed unuttered Mongol oaths.

The camels went swaying into the night and far into the day. There was no pursuit. Apparently the villagers, robbed of their only successful means of combating the fugitives, had been content to swallow their rage. The pill-doctor was lost to them, with his magic pellets, lack of which might permit an early grave to enfold the superstitious old chief.

At midday the camels were halted for a brief rest and then urged onward wearily till night. The men found water by digging, and Gilbertson saw that his old course would have brought him to safety if he could have held out.

The woman came to him as Chang made camp, and in a voice that had fear and eloquence, gave him warning.

"You will be careful, my master," she said. "He will kill you."

"Nonsense — Chang?" laughed Gilbertson.

But she put a finger on her lips and looked a sorrowful rebuke.

"Why should he kill me?" asked Gilbertson more soberly. "All he wants is Zahid Beg's wedding-money and the camels, and an undisputed trail into Mongolia."

The woman looked at him pityingly, tempering her impatience with fear.

Chang interrupted them, and though Gilbertson would not admit the thought of treachery on the part of the Mongol, it was easy to imagine the existence of a sinister regard in the man's eyes.

Chang said something to the woman in a dialect Gilbertson did not understand, and she walked away with him. To Gilbertson there was something in her attitude that suggested the cowering of a frightened child under a blow.

He turned away and strode a few paces into the desert. A cold wind blew across the tops of the dunes and eddied into the gullies with mournful soughing. There was a thick haze over the horizon, and only a few stars near the zenith were visible. The blackness of the night was oppressive. The sound of the wind gave creepy suggestion of those evil spirits of old Ser Marco, calling the unwary to destruction in the great waste.

Of a sudden Gilbertson recalled that he was totally unarmed. He had not even a knife. He would not permit himself to fear attack by the Mongol, yet he knew it was folly for him to remain without means of defense. Some weapon was necessary, if not for his own security, at least for that of the woman. Among the camp utensils he had seen a beautiful sharp-pointed knife, one that might have been used for the flaying of wild camels. Of this knife he resolved to possess himself.

Gilbertson made his appearance somewhat tardily at the meager evening meal. He gulped his tea and munched dried melon-rinds with a sort of nervous self-consciousness that grew out of his furtive alertness for a chance to purloin the coveted knife. It was there, among the camp utensils, gleaming dully in the light of the fire. The intensity of his desire for it had grown until the knife seemed to him now the most desired object in the world.

When Chang, at the close of the meal, picked up the knife and casually slipped it into his belt, Gilbertson could have shouted with rage. Then a feeling of the utmost chagrin was succeeded by a sense of growing indifference that bordered upon recklessness. He startled his companions by laughing harshly, as he had done on that previous occasion in the desert when he found himself in the hands of a similarly callous fate.

He went to a sheltered gully to windward of camp, where the drifted sand was soft and deep, and wrapped himself in his sleeping-bag. What was the use of battling with fate? If the Mongol meant to kill him he would do it, no doubt. What chance had he against a man armed with a gun and a knife? Perhaps he might wrest one or the other from him in personal encounter, but could he, single-handed, hope to disarm the man completely?

His mind hesitated a moment over the

possibility of stealing upon the Mongol as he slept, then dismissed the thought. Chang had boasted of the fact that he slept with his eyes half-open.

Strangely enough, Gilbertson slept as a child sleeps.

CHANG lay in the lee of a camel for warmth, the vileness of camel-odor being in no sense a deterrent to his hardened sensibilities. He fingered the knife at his belt, and opening the chamber of the revolver saw that it was filled with cartridges. He placed no great reliance in such affairs as this upon the gun. In fact he had always looked with a good deal of suspicion upon this invention of the foreign devil.

The knife—that was the thing.

Tucking the revolver into the folds of his outer garment he felt once more the keen edge of the blade, then slipped it again into his belt, lying back into the sand, waiting. The woman was becoming too fond of the foreigner. He could see that in her eyes. It was better that it should end at once. There would be one less mouth to feed, and there was not too much food to last until they could get more.

The woman, under her tiny tent of skins, lay in an icy trembling. She had resolved to sacrifice herself for the man—no uncommon thing in a land whose literature and tradition are most richly adorned by the heroic sacrifices of women, but one nevertheless to cause this one to tremble. It was the sort of sacrifice hundreds of thousands of women have made in the East to the call of filial piety.

The woman's trembling ceased when she rose and stole softly from the tent. A silver crescent of moon etched dim outlines into the desolate landscape. She made out the forms of the camels and went toward them, very slowly, fearful even of the wraith of shadow that followed her.

In the lee of the first camel lay the man to whom she must give herself in an effort to disarm him of that weapon which otherwise would slay the foreigner. The white man—this was all that caused her to hesitate, for she had no fear for herself—might not understand. He might abandon her, even kill her, for what she was about to do.

These foreigners, she knew, had strange ideas concerning the value of a woman's bodily purity. Thus, success might mean disaster equally as great as failure; yet she was determined to possess herself of that weapon about which all life now seemed to revolve.

The woman knelt swiftly at the side of the sleeping Mongol. Shudderingly she prepared to waken him with a caress of abandonment. She saw the gleam of his eyes through thin slits between his eyelids, and wondered if he were awake. But his breathing was regular; he was asleep—asleep with his eyes open, as he had so often boasted.

Her hesitation gave time for a discovery that startled her heart into a wild crescendo. From an opening in his cotton-padded outer garment protruded the butt of the revolver.

With the movement of a cat poised for recoil she touched it, closed her fingers about it, and, keeping her eyes upon his face, slowly pulled it forth. Primitive instinct almost overpowered her. Rage welled up within her breast as if in compensation for her previous fear. Consciousness of power made her exult in a desire to kill, to be revenged.

She knew nothing of guns, but undoubtedly could shoot him as he lay. Yet she stole away, triumphantly, lightly, her soul in a transport of exultation. It was a triumph no less keen than if she had made her sacrifice. Having desired and dared the sacrifice, hers must still be the credit in her own soul.

"It is the man's place to kill," she muttered to herself as she stumbled through the sand, carrying the weapon to Gilbertson.

But her knees suddenly became unsteady, the beating of her heart oppressive. She must rest awhile. Under the rude tent of skins she held the gun to her cheek and trembled once more with weakness and fear.

Chang, dreaming of his native Mongol village, with wild flowers blooming in the wide pastures and the Chinese woman of the desert by his side in the doorway of an adobe hut, awoke suddenly and cursed himself for having slept. It seemed to him in his dream that the Chinese woman had drawn a knife from his belt and thrust it feebly against his breast. He reached for the knife, now that he was awake, and was reassured by the touch of the cold blade.

He had not intended to sleep. There must be no sleep for him until the white man was out of the way. Perhaps this would be the best time. Why wait any longer?

Chang rose from the foul warmth of the camel's bed and looked toward the gully where Gilbertson lay. He had no thought of the distrusted revolver, but kept his hand caressingly upon the handle of the knife.

Gilbertson awoke with a premonition so clear and ghastly it left no doubt in his mind as to the intent of the dark figure that bent menacingly over him. With a stifled cry he sprang as the Mongol's knife fell, and spoiled the aim of the blow.

All the strength he could command was centered in a convulsive lurch toward Chang's feet. He grappled them, and tugged with such a tempestuous fury that the Mongol reeled and fell heavily backward. The sleeping-blanket hampered the white man's efforts to get to his feet and the Mongol was up before him.

The great weight of the man's body, lunging fiercely at Gilbertson, carried him helplessly into the sand, but he grasped the hand that held the knife, and, holding it to his mouth, tore savagely at the tendons of the wrist with his teeth. No sound of agony came from the Mongol, but taking the knife into his left hand he plunged it swiftly, surely, into the white man's side.

The woman, in her tent, heard nothing save the wind that shrieked like an endless troupe of demons over the crests of sand. When she had regained her strength she went out toward the gully where Gilbertson lay. She was in time to see the pitiful struggle that ended in a moan from the white man and a quivering into helpless relaxation.

As Chang stood up over his victim, a leer of barbaric satisfaction curling his lips, the woman confronted him. She could not have told how she managed it, but in her hands the gun spoke, shaking the solitude of the desert. Before the Mongol fell she shot again, and then, standing over his quiet form she made the gun blaze vivid paths of flame into his body until its chamber was empty and only successive empty clicks answered the movement of her finger on the trigger.

V

VONG found them there in the early forenoon, the woman in a ghastly hysteria, the camel-drivers helpless with terror, and Gilbertson moaning in his blood beside the body of the Mongol.

The great caravan of which Vong was a member halted there all day, and camped there at night, though it was far from a water-hole. There were Chinese officials wearing insignia of the court at Peking in the caravan, and a guard of soldiers from Hami. The officials looked upon it as a miracle that the woman of whom they had come in search should have been found thus. They weighed secretly, in anticipation, the gold of their reward. The surprise had been accented by the discovery three days before of a dead camel and beside it the *Amban's* rotting corpse.

To Vong the discovery of Gilbertson was no less a surprise after encountering, five days previously, Gilbertson's dead "ship of the desert" and his camp outfit, half buried in drifted sand!

Delirium came to Gilbertson before he understood the cause of his deliverance, and the delirium continued over the slow desert marches that brought him on an improvised stretcher, carried by camel-drivers, into the city of Khotan. The mission-doctor treated him there and the verdict was slow recovery.

To the house of the missionary, when Gilbertson regained consciousness, came the woman of the desert. They looked into each other's eyes in silence for a long time before speaking. Even when they spoke it was not to make clearer their understanding.

"This is a wonderful woman," thought Gilbertson. "Beautiful, courageous, a woman to whom life would be the least of all sacrifices for the man she loved. If she were only white I would marry her."

"I thought I loved the young emperor," was what ran through the woman's mind. "But this white man is the one who is master of my soul. I would willingly give up the life of luxury to which I am recalled in the emperor's household for this wandering foreigner. He will not marry me, but I would be content as his slave, his plaything. Yet he is too honorable, according to the foolish standards they call morals in his country, to have me for a mistress—or perhaps too wise, since it would be dishonor to him."

Her soul was very full of a great sickness, but the smile that played upon her face was the studied smile of the stoic East that so skilfully conceals the ills of the soul. When she spoke it was only to say:

"Tomorrow, O honorable one, the caravan

returns across the desert. I am going back to Peking, to become the young emperor's third wife. I do not wish to go."

"Stay here then," was what impulse urged him to say, but his spoken rejoinder was: "Has your father regained the confidence of the Old Buddha, then?"

She nodded.

"He has become a viceroy."

There seemed to be nothing more to say, yet she sat there a long time, silent, before she went away.

When she was gone Gilbertson projected himself into a new delirium by leaping from the bed to go in search of the woman—to hold her, to keep her, to beg her to stay. The half-healed wound opened anew and the mission doctor looked upon him with a somber countenance.

The delirium went away and Gilbertson's mind became clear again. Vong came and bent over him. Gilbertson remembered the perdition to which he had consigned Vong on the desert march, and marveled at the man's fidelity. Vong could have taken Gilbertson's silver, but he had not. Instead, he had brought it from the pack on the dead camel. It was all there, every ounce.

"Have you had any word from the little wife?" asked Gilbertson kindly.

"She has another son," smiled the interpreter.

After an interval, closing his eyes, Gilbertson asked in a faint voice—

"The woman, Vong—where is she?"

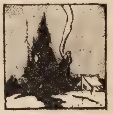
"Gone."

"How long, Vong?"

"Five days."

Gilbertson turned his face to the wall and cursed his conventional Western soul.

THE CAMP-FIRE
A MEETING-PLACE FOR READERS, WRITERS AND ADVENTURERS



CARROLL K. MICHENER, with his first story in our magazine, follows our custom and stands up to introduce himself:

> There is nothing more stimulating to the imagination than to stand at the great gates of Peking, and watch the camel caravans filing in with their silent, shuffling tread, ending a journey that may have brought them from the very center of the continent. What endless stretches of desert sands they have traversed, what solitudes, what cities, what mountains and valleys! They stir up untold images of the people and places, beyond the Great Wall through which they have passed not long since in their descent from the Mongol mountains to the fertile plains of China.
>
> IT WAS such a caravan as one of these, dust-grimed, wearied, shuffling in through the great south gate of the Tartar city of Peking, that was the inspiration of my story, "The Woman of the Desert." And into the story I put a bit of the personality of a real man, a friend, one of the truest adventurers living, and a bit of the life he has lived. It is not his story, the story of the man and the woman in the desert, but the web of it is spun from yarn raveled for me from his adventures, sitting through long, hot nights in a newspaper office in Shanghai.
>
> I have never crossed a desert, but desert lore has always had a fascination for me. I shall cross a desert before I die, or the Fates are unkind. They were unkind once, when they laid me low with a Far Eastern fever while I contemplated a fleeting opportunity to cross Asia by unbeaten paths from the Pacific to the Mediterranean, but I do not cherish it against the Fates, with whom it is well for an adventurer to be on good terms.
>
> BUT though I have not crossed a desert in fact, I have passed through all the waste places in the Eastern hemisphere with the greatest of the explorers. Of these, my favorite companion of the travel-books has been the incomparable Sven Hedin, the greater part of whose lifetime has been spent in trekking through the unknown or little-known regions of Asia. From him and from my friend the adventurer—who really is a pill-seller in darkest Asia!—I have borrowed whatever there is of desert lore in "The Woman of the Desert." The custom of carrying ice in a blanket through the deserts will not seem strange to those who are familiar with Sven Hedin—nor will a thousand strange things concerning the peoples and places of remote Asia that might have been borrowed into the tale.
>
> I'M A little shy of speaking about myself, so even though the Camp-Fire offers an incomparable opportunity, I'm going to be brief. I'm a

newspaper man who has haunted the newspaper offices of many cities in the United States. My only real claim to capital adventure, however, is having worked my way around the world as a newspaper writer, picking up a job wherever I landed "broke," and staying until I had enough to move on. I went leisurely, stopping when it pleased me to stop long, and the journey took three and a half years. Hawaii claimed me for many months, then Japan; but China held me longest. I loathed the country when I first set foot in it, but learned to love it—and stayed a year!

OLD-TIME members of the Camp-Fire will be glad to know that at this writing the last report (from Montevideo, Uruguay) on our old friend Captain Fritz Duquesne states that he was merely severely wounded in his expedition's fight with hostile Indians near the Bolivian border of the Argentine, not killed as was first cabled from Buenos Aires to the newspapers here.

After several years of silence during his former expedition up the Amazon I and others got brief word from him that after a bad time with fever he was again all right and was soon to sail for this country. But on the eve of departure came the chance to command the Bolivian expedition and he couldn't resist. The last report says he was found by troops somewhere along the Pilcomayo River, which divides Paraguay from the Argentine, after a fight in which his party were victorious.

SO MANY new readers of *Adventure* have joined our ranks of late that it would seem the part of good-fellowship for all of us old members of the Camp-Fire to stand up in our places and welcome them with a friendly greeting. We all come together here as comrades with a common interest in the strong, wholesome things of life and those who are new among us should be made to feel as much at home as if they had always been of our number. So many new readers of *Adventure* have joined us recently — the six months ending with the March issue showed an increase of forty per cent. and the present six months, from all indications, are bringing us a still greater number—that it seems up to us of the "old guard" to extend to them in a body our hearty greetings and friendly welcome.

SOME time ago F. M. Muhlig, County Superintendent of Schools for Will County, Illinois, wrote to me suggesting that it would make excellent reading if the magazine could get the full story of the "Gang from Pincher's Creek." I wrote Mr. Muhlig, hoping he himself could give us the tale, but he had not the time for this. He did, however hastily jot down the story in brief for me, to pass on to the Camp-Fire. How many of you know about it? It would seem, as Mr. Muhlig says, too worthy for oblivion.

Received your reply to my inquiry as to the story of the "Gang from Pincher's Creek." Hope you can get it from some one posted. I can not tell it, but the "Gang" consisted of three men who enlisted from "Pincher's Creek," which is in Alberta. They came from Montana to Canada. They proclaimed frankly to the world and the British army in particular that they were from Pincher's Creek.

Their abilities as horsemen and their plains' experience made them invaluable as scouts. As they were inseparable they scouted together.

UPON one of their scouts they discovered the approach of a large body of Boers who were heading for a pass which, if occupied, would have formed a fatal *cul de sac* for a hundred or more British who had been detached from the main force. There was no time to rush for reinforcements or to warn the endangered British. There was but one thing to do—delay the Boers until the British had passed through the neck of the trap.

Without hesitation they did this. The British came through without molestation, but a search party found the "Gang from Pincher's Creek" lying dead among the rocks where their heroic stand was made. The ground was dotted with empty shells. The three cartridge-belts were found by the side of one man who was evidently the last one alive. Every cartridge had been fired. The bodies were riddled with rifle balls. It was ascertained that at least thirty Boers died there.

THE account of this was read in general orders to the men of the British army and I have heard that a monument was erected where they fell. Some old "scout" who served with Baden-Powell will remember the reading of the orders. The incident is too worthy for oblivion.—F. M. MUHLIG.

BY WAY of introduction from M. F. Brooks, concerning his story in this issue:

Old Wade and *Measles* are real characters, with whom I have for years been associated in trips in the mountains and valleys of California. I have put in years in Death Valley and the Mojave Desert and I try to introduce into each story locations and details that are real and descriptive of this remarkable territory so little known to the people generally.

TO THE Red-Heads, the Gray-Heads, American Foreign Legion, Highland Brigade, and the other similar regiments has been added the suggestion of a Musicians' Regiment, by R. S. Edmiston of the

Second Ind. Band, Miss. N. G., Quitman, Miss. Also a regiment of Tropical Tramps, by G. G. Lansing, 172 Ridgewood Ave., Ridgewood, N. J., who will act as temporary organizer.

As stated previously, the important point back of all these suggestions is the plan of naming and recruiting regiments according to their members' common ancestry, traditions, physical characteristics, etc., thus getting value, at no expense, from that very practical thing, *esprit de corps*. Our present system of designating regiments merely by dry, almost meaningless and undistinguishing numbers is stupid.

I know quite well that most of these regiments will not materialize. *Unless* this country should be plunged into war. (The Civil and the Spanish wars developed similar organizations.) Or unless, as in the case of a few of them, some one or more of you take hold of the actual work of organizing and push it through. But all of them help a little in the work for Defense, and back of all of them is this idea of added *esprit de corps*, which only those unfamiliar with military affairs will dismiss as not being extremely practical and important.

THIS thing of truth's being stranger than fiction makes an editor a lot of trouble. Frequently we reject a story because it is "unconvincing" or "sounds improbable." Sometimes the author writes back in wrath or glee and tells us the story is strictly based on fact. He feels he "has it on" us. He hasn't. He has simply forgotten that a story that is pure fiction may be so well and so naturally told that it sounds entirely possible, while the truth may be so poorly told that it sounds untrue. Or the truth may be so unusual or amazing that no skill in telling can make it sound true.

Now what would be the good of giving our readers true stories that sounded like lies? If a story seems utterly absurd to a reader, it does, and that's all there is about it, even if it is actually true. A reader seldom has time, chance or wish to start a serious investigation of the magazine stories he reads. He reads, passes judgment and that's generally an end of the matter.

NOW consider a story in this very issue—"Yahoya." As the manuscript came to us it stated that one of the Hopi Indians ran 800 miles in 10 days—80 miles a day. It might be true but we knew most of our readers would think it a wild exaggeration. So, with Mr. Gregory's consent, we changed it to twenty days, 40 miles a day—cut it square in two. Yet even so some of you may have written it down as a bad break and wholly impossible. We made similar changes elsewhere in the tale. Mr. Gregory's letter follows:

I agree with you in the matter of toning down the startling matter in the endurance racing. I put the stuff in because it's the truth; because I believe it; because when you speak of Hopi you speak of an animal that is as different from the Bahana as is a wolf from a French poodle. Those lean-bodied devils can do the thing I have told of them; they were builded for it by the desert. But, when all is said and done, I have given you a *story* and the less it strains credulity upon non-essential points, the better it is going to pan out. Will you cut down the number of miles yourself? Or do you want me to do it?

And here are two notes that accompanied the original manuscript:

In connection with the endurance and swiftness of the Southwestern Indian the following fact, well known to thousands of white men who know these strange people, may be cited: The men of Oraibi will run out across the hot desert sands a distance of 40 miles, do a day's work there in their corn-fields, and run back the same day to Oraibi!

See also George Wharton James's, "The Indians of the Painted Desert," p. 91: "One Oraibi, Ku-wa-wen-ti-wa, ran from Oraibi to Moenkopi, thence to Walpi and back to Oraibi, a distance of over 90 miles, in one day."

HERE is a pungent little acrostic for National Defense, sent in by Clarence W. Hamilton of Franklin, Ohio. It's the surest way to spell Peace: Prepare! Else America Can't Exist.

WHO knows whether any concessions have been granted in respect to these two South American lakes reported to contain a vast treasure?

Daytona, Fla.

As a mining engineer, and more or less an adventurer, I read with special interest the stories of "Lost Treasures of the World." I was particularly struck with the physical conditions described in the case of the treasure of Pozo de Donto, and also the Sacred Lake of the Chibchas.

I HAVE had occasion more than once, in another part of the world, to desire to lift the "wash," containing tin and gold, from the bottom of a swamp or small lake, such as is described in the cases above. I could not afford much money for plant, and few men were available and wages very high. I thought the matter out, and tried many experiments, and at last arrived at a solution of the difficulty. I got out the tin all right, and it cost me very little more than mining under more favorable conditions. The method was novel, and neither before or since have I seen it adopted. It would be the ideal method to employ in the case of these treasure lakes, and is thoroughly applicable to them, if the rough description given is even approximately correct.

CAN you tell me if any concession is held over either or both these lakes at the present time? And if so, how can I get in touch with the owners? I would like to suggest to those interested (for a consideration of course, if my methods were adopted) a certain and cheap method of solving the difficulty.

If they are not so held I should like to know, for in that case I should go and look over the ground, and if they are as described, then form an adventure party, adopt my dodge, and—prove if those $600,000,000 are really awaiting the adventurer.—R. Purdue.

BY CAMP-FIRE custom Roy P. Churchill rises and introduces himself on the occasion of the first story he gives us:

> A lot of the people in the United States have no idea at all, or at least a very limited one, of the Navy. They know we have one, but what the ships do and how the men live is a closed book to them. My excuse for pestering the editors with Navy stories is to tell about the Navy and let some of the people on the "Outside" know how the boys on the "Inside" live and love and play and fight.
>
> I ENLISTED from an inland town, in Kentucky to be exact, as a landsman for training and was paid off with a "big ticket" as a boatswain's mate. The experiences I had and the yarns I heard form the basis for the stories. Some of my shipmates in the South Atlantic may recognize themselves or their friends and I wonder if somebody will pick up this copy of *Adventure* and remember the forty-day trip the windjammer *Alliance* made from Hampton Roads to Plymouth.
>
> The idea for "Hereditary Evidence" came from an experience while on furlough, and a train wreck in California, where I now live. I thought it would be unusual and interesting thus to combine the land and sea.

PUBLISHING a story laid 3,300 years ago is something new for this magazine. Personally I like stories of the past, but I realized many of you do not and when Mr. Bishop, then a stranger to me, came in to talk over in advance "In the Grip of the Minotaur," laid about 1400 B. C., I sort of shied away from it. Also I feared he and Dr. Brodeur knew too much about archeology and ancient history to write a fiction tale without spoiling its story with too much lugged-in information.

But I took a chance and I'm glad I did. I don't think any one can accuse the authors of parading the knowledge they undoubtedly have or of failing to say their say simply and clearly. It's a man's story, told by men. And, to me at least, it's a very real world its characters move in.

AS TO Crete's wonderfully developed civilization in that distant day I think you will find the story's local color true and in accord with the latest findings of scientific investigation and theory. Any of you who can visit the famous Cretan collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in this city can verify quite a good deal of it.

In accordance with Camp-Fire custom, here is a word of introduction from Mr. Bishop, speaking for both authors. (Incidentally it was written when Mr. Bishop was enlisting in the First Armored Motor Battery, N. G. N. Y., a pioneer in that branch of national preparedness.)

> In reply to your letter asking for the titles of the "scientific books" Dr. Brodeur and myself have written, I would beg to state that there ain't no sich animiles. To be sure, Dr. Brodeur has translated the Younger Edda into English for the Scandinavian-American Society. I have written "Panama Past and Present," "The Story of the Submarine," and several magazine articles on the Panama Canal. Both of us have had a long training in historical research, and a perverted taste for digging up queer things out of the past.
>
> PAST and present, like East and West, have the same fascinating resemblances and differences, whatever times and places you visit. There is a certain village in England where men have been chipping flints since the old Stone Age; first for spear-heads, then for striking fire, then for flintlocks, enough of which were traded into Africa to keep half a dozen aged "flint-nappers" busy down to the outbreak of the Great War. Then the whole village went back to the old trade, for many soldiers in the trenches are lighting their cigarettes with flint and steel (Grant lit his cigars that way in the Civil War), instead of matches. Compared to that, what is a little thing like sanitary plumbing in 1400 B. C.?
>
> THE story of Atlantis was first set down by Herodotus, the Father of History, whom the Egyptian priests told of the vanished glories of a great island in the midst of the sea, from which ships traded with Egypt till the island disappeared beneath the waves. To the Greeks of Herodotus's time (about 450 B. C.), the sea meant the great ocean beyond the Pillars of Hercules; so they placed the lost island there. But to the Egyptians of a thousand years before, the sea meant the Mediterranean. We know that there existed on the island of Crete, in the midst of the eastern end of that sea, a great maritime civilization, which traded with Egypt for many centuries, and came to an abrupt and catastrophic end about 1400 or 1350 B. C. What is more natural than the growth of a legend, during the next

thousand years, in which the cessation of all news from the island was explained by its disappearance beneath the sea?

This theory was first advanced in an unsigned letter to a London newspaper in 1906, and is now accepted by many scholars, though we must wait for more evidence before we can say that it is either proved or disproved. It is the simplest and most plausible solution of the Atlantis mystery, and calls for no such tremendous convulsion of Nature as the submergence of a large island or small continent. Trying to account for the disappearance of Atlantis is, in the present state of our knowledge, exactly like trying to account for the disappearance of the crew of the *Marie Céleste.*

IN ASCRIBING the fall of Knossos to raiders from the North, Dr. Brodeur and I were simply "plot-building." My partner knows his Norsemen—he reads sagas in the original Icelandic and could work his passage on a viking ship—and he was searching for some spot untouched by Rider Haggard for his heroes to raid, when I mentioned Minoan Crete. That was too early for vikings, but not for the peaceful but by no means pacifist traders who preceded them.

As for our own adventures; we haven't had any. Both of us have led mild and peaceful middle-class lives. We roomed together at Harvard.

HERE is an interesting chapter from an adventurer's life—a look-in for stay-at-homes at the kind of things that are happening away from the dull lines of routine in settled communities.

I am not a writer by all means, but a reader of your magazine ever since I came to the States. Will quote briefly: Born in the Highlands of Bavaria, Germany, southern part, in 1887. Went to sea at the age of 12 years, and you can take it from me I had experiences and adventures of all sorts. Will recount some of them possibly to you later. Saw in your Camp-Fire an article asking about information concerning how your magazine was obtained in out-of-the-way places. If interesting to you, will recount it. By the way, tell you this only to keep my mind busy and away from my present plight, as I am down to my last dollar again. Well, here she goes:

IT MUST have been in 1907 or '08 that, while wandering down South Street, I chanced upon an old shipmate of mine. Same was mate, or rather second mate and acting bos'un, on a handy little three-sticker (a fore-and-after). Decided to join him on the trip. We were bound to West Indies and Central American ports with a general cargo. Outward bound, nothing happened. The vessel had very good qualities, a fast sailer, and the skipper an exceptionally hard driver. There were only three men in the forecastle, myself included.

NOW, owing to harsh and unjust treatment, received from the hands of German sailors during three years of apprenticeship, I simply never can take to any of them kindly. But one of these seemed to be excepted. He came from the northern part of Germany, somewhere up in Pomerania. He was of good family and seemed to be an altogether different fellow from the rest that I had to deal with before. To make my yarn shorter, we became good mates, always recounting stories and happenings from the old country.

He was pretty green as far as seamanship was concerned, never having been on any sailing vessel, but I helped him out whenever possible and he soon was doing very well indeed. In fact, too well, as all of a sudden he fell victim to that terrible sickness called swelled-head, and became quite a personage. But he never said boo when it came to reefing or making fast topsails in a squall. After his first attack I left him all to himself, and even repulsed his later advances, as I now classed him with the rest of the roundheads.

WE CAME to Puerto Cortez (Spanish Honduras) Christmas evening. The old man advanced us a couple of dollars. We rowed ashore to celebrate in a dive run by a Frenchman. We got hilarious and you know how it is when you have a grudge against some one. Sooner or later it will out, and wine in a tropical country sets you simply boiling. Don't know if it was a girl of that dive started us off or what. Come to think now, it was some brown Venus. He claimed that she favored him better than me and we fools spent our $10 a mile a minute, just to please her, and got thrown out when we were broke.

Outside, we renewed the argument. He being a strong young man and I much smaller in proportion, he thought to do away quickly with me. But he found out different. I found I had to finish him quickly and accordingly put all my strength and energy in the assault and attacked him with a ferocity that he had not expected. His style was that of the wrestler, mine both wrestling and boxing.

NOW mind, at the time, the country down there was in a revolutionary state and martial law was pronounced in Puerto Cortez. When I laid him out with a right-arm-swing to the jaw, my senses cleared and I thought I had killed the man. I did not have much time to find out, either, as a bunch of native soldiers laid hold of me and we went in the direction of the main part of the town. Then realization came quick, and all the remorseful thoughts of my action with it. I decided to escape if possible.

How I got away, and how I got back to the vessel and away again, and how I had to hide from the soldiers, in the swamps never before penetrated by white men, alone would take a book to tell. I really don't know today how long I hid, but found myself fever-crazed one morning on the beach, about thirty miles from port. I was literally cut to pieces, my whole body was swollen, as mosquitoes there abound in real clouds. What a blessing that salt-water bath was to me when I dragged myself on all fours down to the water's edge! You can not imagine unless you have experienced something like it yourself.

HOW I got along and acquainted myself with some of the natives would make interesting reading. To come back to my subject: Way out in the swamps I lived unknown to any, outside of a Chinaman and one black fellow. He was a deformed Hercules, the most hideous being you could imagine. He supplied me every month with food from the town. We both were partners in the swamps where we gained a precarious existence by burning blue mango wood and making charcoal (almost any woman in that country uses same). Also gathering palm-kernels, stealing and marauding upon plantations (only fruits), which the negro then sold in Puerto Cortez to traders and in the public market. Never did get much more out of it than my grub, as he usually came home drunk, half of the goods lost or stolen, and in a very bad frame of mind. On those occasions had to defend myself for life at times.

Went almost crazy with the heat, then the rainy weather arrived, and I got spells of fever again. The only medicine I had was a grass which grows there, of a sour taste, has very long leaves, and is used to make tea for those stricken with fever.

ONE day, during Grant's absence (he called himself Grant), I decided to do something—get some books, at least, as I could endure it no longer to lay in our Mannaka shack day and night—think and think. Got out to the beach (we were camped some miles away, in the forest swamp), and made my way along the same slowly. Came across some natives (same are mostly mixed breeds, Indians, blacks, Spanish and Chinese), who gave me a willing ride in their canoe for the day. They camped at night somewhere along the beach, and next morning I left them to make my way by boat, as they told me there was a ranch run by an American not far distant. When I got there, I asked for reading matter, and especially for my old friend, *Adventure*. Imagine my chagrin when I could not get a single copy of the same.

NOW I have told you my yarn. I don't know if you like same. It's somewhat arduous and incomplete, and not what you asked for, only the reverse. I went out for magazines, in my mind especially the *Adventure* in the foreground, and got very much disappointed. How I fared after I left the ranch is still another story, too long to recount at present. If you care to hear some more at another time, and are able to read my bad English, I am always at your disposition. For the present I am yours,—Sam Tuer.

MOST of you will see at once that "The Receipt" by S. B. H. Hurst in this issue is a sequel to "The Marrow-Bone" published early in this year.

I'M GLAD to republish here the following from "Privates' Manual," by Captain Jas. A. Moss, U. S. A. The book is one of the excellent series by Captain Moss (Geo. Banta Pub. Co., Menasha, Wis.), which includes "Field Service," "Officers' Manual," "Non-Commissioned Officers' Manual," "Manual of Military Training," "Applied Minor Tactics," "Militia Field Manual," "Field Sanitation," "A Working Knowledge of Spanish" and "Elements of Modern Field Artillery." "Self-Helps for the Citizen-Soldier" has already been mentioned in Camp-Fire.

THE PATRIOT'S MILITARY CREED

I BELIEVE in Peace, but in Peace with Honor and Self-Respect.

I BELIEVE that War is a terrible thing that should be avoided, if possible, but I also believe that there are things in this world worse than War, and Peace without Honor and Self-Respect is one of them.

I BELIEVE in what the Flag of my Country stands for—Honor, Justice, Truth, Civilization, Democracy, Liberty, Humanity.

I BELIEVE it the duty of every American to uphold the Flag and what it stands for, and I believe it the duty of every able-bodied American to prepare himself in a Military way for this Responsibility.

I BELIEVE in Personal Preparedness, by which I mean if I am ever needed to defend my Sister, my Mother, my Home, and my Country, I will be Prepared to do so.

I BELIEVE in National Preparedness, by which I mean my Country being Prepared to uphold what the Flag stands for and to defend itself if attacked.

I BELIEVE that Citizenship carries with it Obligations as well as Privileges, and I believe that Military Service is one of the most important of these Obligations.

I BELIEVE in the benefits of Military Training; I believe that it strengthens the body, benefits the health, improves the mind and teaches obedience, respect for law and order, patriotism, courtesy, honor, loyalty, manliness, cleanliness, thoroughness, system, organization and team-work. In short, I believe in Military Training because it makes for Efficiency and better Citizenship.

HERE'S an old friend we haven't heard from for two years, and he reports something that will be of particular interest to those of you who knew the old West. The omitted part of his letter was devoted to "roasting" one of our recent novelettes, but knocks, like boosts, we try to keep out of "Camp-Fire." The Indian words Mr. Huston speaks of, were referred, as he suggested, to Mr. C. L. Gilman, but the latter claims little knowledge of the Ojibway language.

Camp in the Mountains back of St. Helena, Calif.
Jan. 15, 1916.

Still here (just knocked wood) but getting older and weaker. A ten-mile line of twenty traps is hard for me now, but the spirit is yet strong.

It is snowing like —— where there is no snow. My stove smokes, as does my lantern, and the green pelts stink like, well, there is no comparison, they simply stink. However, my colt comes up, unlooses the tent-flap and tries to come in a dozen times in the twenty-four hours; then my dog preëmpts my bed and I squat on my heels like a gugu.

SINCE I wrote you two years ago I have lost the sight of one eye and have to shoot wholly right-handed now. . . . (is that spelt O. K.) and by the way O. K. is *ar an* or *am*, two Indian words meaning "quite so," "precisely," "sure," "all right." Get Gilman to look this up among the 'Jibways near him, but I think it's Osage or Pawnee.

I hope the author does not make a mess of Bill Hickock ["Wild Bill"] or Hikox as some spell it. I knew him before his death, he was with Berdan's Sharpshooters with my cousin California Joe (Joe Huston), both "Damyanks," but Hikox was the younger man.

NOW here is a tip for you. A few years ago I walked a beat for the ——, and one of the officers of the same was a man I had seen and known slightly in "Missouroh" years ago. I recognized him and he me, but neither said anything then. When I quit, he gave me the high sign and promised me rapid advancement, etc., if I would stay, but I did not like the yaps and squareheads he had on his rolls.

A YEAR or so later his wife shot him (killed him) and told who he was, but very few believed that what she charged was the truth, yet it was God's own solemn truth. I do not know the story, but have an inkling. After Crittenden pardoned him for shooting Jesse James and he was shot and reported killed, he recovered and, knowing he was a marked man, he came to California and, as a reward for guarding Otis, was started in business. Yes, Bob Ford and no other. Sure? Of course I'm sure. I *know*. And Evans or Sontag or any of the Daltons yet alive could verify it if they would.

Only one mail every three months.

Good luck to you. Will be in Yountville, California, March 10th, to get mail and bounties (coyote and lion).—FRANK H. HUSTON, ESQ.

THE CAMP-FIRE

THE camp-fire flings on high its cheerful glow
And burns a golden cavern in the night,
Around whose walls the shadows come and go,
Projected by the ever-changing light;
And here are gathered from the bounds of earth
The men who for the weaker blaze the trail,
Brothers in everything excepting birth,
Whose footprints mark advancement's outer pale.

And now a voice is heard from out the gloom—
Another comes the company to grace—
Closer they gather then to make him room
And give to him a comfortable place.
What though his face they ne'er have seen before?
Most welcome is he made to all their cheer,
Regardless of the name or rank he bore;
He is a Man or he would not be here.

What brings them here? None seems to know or care.
They are the restless-footed ones of earth;
Hardship they face and countless dangers dare,
And hold their lives as things of little worth.
But now the fire has sunk to glowing coals,
And through the branches stars begin to beam,
As each within his blankets snugly rolls.
Sleep comes to all and silence reigns supreme.

ED. L. CARSON,
(with his compliments, to our Camp-Fire).

BACK ISSUES OF *ADVENTURE*

NOTE—A department for our readers' convenience. Our own supply of old issues is exhausted back of 1915; even 1915 is partly gone. Readers report that back *Adventures* can almost never be found at second-hand book-stalls. Practically the only way to get special back copies or to fill out your files is to watch this department for offers made by the few readers who are willing to sell or pass on stray copies or more or less complete files. Our office files are, of course, complete and we do not buy back copies or act as agents for them.

Complete file to date, good condition. Had intended having them bound but find I can not spare the room. Open to offer.—E. N. Dwight, Dwight Brokerage Co., Register Bldg., Wheeling, W. Va.

LETTER FRIENDS

NOTE—This is a service for those of our readers who want some one to write to. For adventurers afield who want a stay-at-home "letter bunkie," and for stay-at-homes, whether ex-adventurers or not, who wish to get into friendly touch with some one who is out "doing things." We publish names and addresses—the rest is up to you, and of course we assume no responsibility of any kind. Women not admitted.

(31) Jack Wright, Alpine Hotel, San Francisco, Calif.; (32) Chas. H. Johnston, Jr., 62 College St., Providence, R. I.; (33) A. W. Latimer, R. R. 7, Lawrence, Kan.; (34) Warren H. Ulsh, 217 E. English St., Wichita, Kan.

OUR identification cards remain free to any reader. The two names and addresses and a stamped envelope bring you one.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

HERE is an interesting suggestion for a general brotherhood of adventurers and ex-adventurers. Of course the Adventurers' Club, with its various chapters, is already in the field, but perhaps there is need and place for a more general order. If such a society were started it should not, I think, use the word "Camp-Fire," not only because our Camp-Fire already exists, but because if it were definitely organized with badges bearing the name, the proposed brotherhood would by many be considered merely a circulation scheme for this magazine. Also, there is a local organization in New York City called the Camp-Fire

Club, having no connection with this magazine.

If the idea appeals to you, write to Mr. Garvey and talk it over. It looks to me like a splendid idea.

The other night whilst sitting in my room, pondering over an old number of *Adventure*, I began to wonder how many more lonely souls there were that night whose thoughts ran like mine, on what might have been, and what had been. Of men who write in the Camp-Fire and men who are more or less eaten up by the Wanderlust and who have seen both sides of life. The more I studied over this thought, the more I became convinced that, many such men who are now unknown to each other could, by some symbol, be made aware of the kindred nature of the other and probably find enjoyment and solace in each other's company.

THEN arose the thought: Why not a Brotherhood of some description? Possibly an "Order of the Camp-Fire," with a specified emblem, and members that pledge themselves to obey the rules, which should be such that any man (and I mean a *man*), could live up to.

I sincerely believe that some such order might prove beneficial in many ways to some of the boys who must forever search new ways and trails, and I believe, if such a thing should be born, that its emblems would be seen in all phases of life in all countries before very long.

That's only my idea. If you think it's at all feasible, put it up to the bunch and find out what they think about it.

I believe we could soon have a very strong order of men who would find it possible to help each other in many, many ways.—JNO. J. GARVEY, The Crossing Rooms, 3 Main St., Akron, O.

AND here, from another man, then in Mexico, comes the same suggestion:

It has been over a year since I have bothered you with a letter, so I believe I am entitled to another chance.

I must tell you of an incident which happened in Mexico some time ago. I was riding pretty fast for the nearest town I could find, as I had been out of grub for a day and a half, and I was a hungry *hombre*. My horse stepped into a dog-hole, breaking his leg. I shot the poor devil, and started to foot it. Still toward town, as my stomach was about ready to sue me for non-support. Before I started, I had cached my saddle and pack the best I could.

I HAD been walking about two hours when I saw the smoke of an engine. I headed that way and found it was a freight. I flagged it down, walked to the caboose, and took a good American sassing for being a good-for-nothing cow-puncher bumming a ride. Anyway, this said *hombre* invited me into the caboose, cooked me up one meal, and then another one. He and two Mexicans were the crew. After he had seen me putting that grub away, he said he would take that back about me being good for nothing, as I sure could eat.

We both rolled a cigarette, when I saw a copy of *Adventure* under the bench. I asked him who it belonged to. He said he had been reading it ever since it first came out. I showed him my identification-card. Then we shook hands; we were brothers of the Camp-Fire. I told him about my saddle and pack. He stopped the train while the Greasers got it for me.

THERE is where the idea hit me. Why not organize the Camp-Fire? Make it a body of its own. Can you imagine what the two of us meeting in such a strange manner had to talk about? Why the Camp-Fire, of course. Think it over, old timer.

He and I stayed together for one week in Arizona. I had two letters from him, but, the last time I wrote, the letter was returned unopened. I am trying to find out his whereabouts.

I STAYED around the State of Arizona for a while, then went over into New Mexico. Was in Columbus three days before the Villa raid. I tried to get back in time to see the Willard-Moran fight but couldn't make it. I'm back home now, taking in the big sights. I ran across *Adventure* in many strange places. I will tell you maybe some time again. As this is enough for another year.

Hoping you will think over what I said regarding Camp-Fire.—Id.1927.

INFORMATION DIRECTORY

IMPORTANT: Only items like those below can be printed—standing sources of information. No room on this page to ask or answer specific questions. Recommend no source of information you are not *sure* of. False information may cause serious loss, even loss of life. *Adventure* does its best to make this directory reliable, but assumes no responsibility therefor.

For data on the Amazon country write Algot Lange, care U. S. Consul, Para, Brazil. Replies only if stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed and only at Mr. Lange's discretion, this service being purely voluntary. (Five-cent postage in this case.)

For the Banks fisheries, Frederick William Wallace, editor *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal. Same conditions as above.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

For Adventurers' Club, get data from this magazine.

For The American Legion, The Secretary, The American Legion, 10 Bridge St., New York.

Mail Address and Forwarding—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

For cabin-boat and small boat travel on the Mississippi and its tributaries, "The Cabin-Boat Primer," by Raymond S. Spears; A. R. Harding, Publisher, Columbus, O., $1.00.

National School Camp Ass'n; address its Sec'y, care *The Globe*, 75 Dey St., New York.

Red-Headed Regiment, Fred C. Adams, Chatham, N. Y.

Gray-Headed Regiment, address Major Guillermo Mac Fergus, care *Adventure*.

Tropical Tramps Regiment, G. G. Lansing, 172 Ridgewood Ave., Ridgewood, N. J.

Marine Corps Gazette, 24 E. 23rd St., New York.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

WANTED —MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

FOLKS who would like to join a party of two in making a "Coast-to-Coast" wagon, machine or hiking trip. One of party (good cook) plans to make trip pay for self. Another (good singer) proposes to travel by day and camp at night. Object adventure outdoors. Open for more suggestions. Only refined people with nerve and good dispositions. No grouches or drinkers. Preference to those in Cal., as we start from Los Angeles, Cal. Share alike in expenses and profits.—Address J. CARMAN, 431 South Hill St., Room 304, Los Angeles, Cal.

SOMEWHERE in Mexico, within 275 kilometers of San Luis, Obispo, is the opportunity with a big "O." Men must be strong; good hikers when needed; must know how to care for themselves. Practical knowledge of a rifle or Colt automatic essential. Equipment furnished, if you are found efficient, to accompany one who knows. Ex-soldiers of Co. I, Engineers, preferred, first. Any one interested, write. —Address EDWARD GUTTERIDGE, Gen. Del., Canyon, Texas.

A TRIP in a van through Western Canada this Summer, and Southern States next Winter, carrying a line of hardware and other specialties to country merchants, should be a good holiday and pay for itself. I wish to correspond with some one who has tried van life and get his experience as to construction of van, horse or motor-power preferred, cost, etc. A congenial partner who has roughed it and not lost his finer qualities preferred.—Address J. PRINCE, P. O. Box 221, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

PARTNER to prospect for gold belts in this State, which seems promising. Will share half in anything we find. Am experienced in finding valuable ores, and camping out. You will acquire health and wealth at small cost. Have your own outfit.—Address E. HEDBURG, Golconda, Ariz.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

DUNLUP, TOM; civil engineer, Woodman of the World and Mason. Worked on Canadian Northern Pacific R. R. 1912, under U. S. Parsenan. Home, Mission, Hidalgo Co., Texas. Left Victoria, British Col., April, 1913, for U. S. A. No trace since. He served in South African War as a Canadian scout. Took part in king's coronation. Canadian papers please copy.—Address MRS. A. C. MITCHELL, Sabinal, Walde Co., Texas.

WALSH, BILLY; last seen of him about five years ago on Hamburg-American Liner, *Prinz Joachim*, then left him at Kingston, Jamaica. Afterward went to Colon when he was expected to resume his work in the Engineering Department of the Isthmian Canal Commission. Did gold-mining in California and Goldfield, Nevada. Prior to Panama, made trip to S. A. Formerly lived in West 57th St., N. Y. C.—Address WALLACE FARRELL, 18 West 86th Street, New York City.

GLENNAN, WILLIAM J., brother, formerly of Shoshone, Idaho. Worked on newspapers and job printing in Idaho and Texas, also in offices of railroads in Mexico. Traced him through the I. T. U. to 1141 Market St., St. Louis, Mo., where he was rooming for nine months. Left there April 15, 1914, and can find no further trace of him. 63 years, blue eyes, short gray mustache.—Address HATTIE GIBBS, 2200A Indiana Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

MARTIN, ALFRED, last known in Jackson Corners, Ont., Can. Blacksmith. May have enlisted in the Canadian troops. Was my pal 1907-8-9 in Detroit, Mich., and in Grosse Isle, Mich. Any one knowing of his whereabouts please write.—Address MAURICE GLENN MACDONALD, 5112 Broadway, Chicago, Ill.

CHIEF steward who took the S. S. *Berkshire* on her trip to Jacksonville, Fla., from Phila., on Sept. 25, please write to me. I am one of the boys who went on a "tear" with you in Savannah, Ga. It means money in your pocket.—Address F. D. ELLIS, 1806 Mt. Vernon Street, Phila., Pa.

BUTTGENBACH, FREDERICK (Fritz), left Louisville, Ky., about 1863 or '64 for Chile, S. A., Santiago or Valparaiso. Born on Rhine, Germany. A letter received about 1873, from a firm in Santiago, stated he went to the Sandwich Islands in 1866. Haven't heard from him since. —Address RUDOLPH DEPPEN, Early Times, Ky.

WHITFIELD, ROBERT, last heard of in Arkansas, 1910, working on locomotive. Age 30. Apprenticed to Clark, Sunderland, Eng. Mother inquires.—Address JOHN WHITFIELD, care Avristan, St. John, N. B., Canada.

CANAVAN, HENRY, last heard of in Newark, N. J. Native of White House, Belfast, Ireland. Age 26; 5 feet; dark complexion.—Address CHARLES CONNOR, care MRS. S. KAISER, Utica, Ill.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

FOINE, ALF, last heard Unuk mining road near Kretchikan, Alaska, 1905. Please write.—Address R. W. COOKE, 1008 University St., Seattle, Wash.

JEFFERSON, JOHN, last heard of Needles, Calif. Dark complexion, 5 feet, age 51, weight 140. Heavy beard when last seen.—Address JAMES C. GOLDING, Box 51, Merced, Cal.

WHIPPLE, RANDOLPH, last seen Oatman, Ariz. Age 20, 5 ft., weight 170, light complexion.—Address JAMES C. GOLDING, Box 51, Merced, Cal.

LAWRENCE, WILL JACK, or "Bill" Glien, who was with the undersigned in the S. S. *Leviathan*, out of Galveston, Aug. 1908.—Address H. B. CLARK, Hazelton, Pa.

BOSTON, JIM, last heard from working for Spanish ranch near Elko, Nevada. Perhaps in San Francisco or Calexica, Cal. Very important. Any one knowing of his whereabouts, write.—Address J. A. (BAD) STANLEY Zelzah, Calif.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

GETCHELL, ERNEST A., last heard from 1907, Carl Junction, Mo. Age 31. Mother anxious.—Address MRS. A. E. GETCHELL, 407 Third St., Portland, Oregon.

HEFFERN, EDWARD, somewhere in San Francisco, Cal. Write to your old Philadelphia pal.—Address FRED D. ELLIS, 1806 Mt. Vernon St., Phila., Pa.

RITTER, W. M., of Baltimore. Last heard of in Canada and Hammond, St. Croix County, Wis. Also Paynesville, Minnesota. Son of Sidney W. Ritter.—Address LOUIS H. RITTER, 1604 W. Lafayette Ave., Baltimore, Md.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

MARKLEY, ISOHM, last heard from in Hood River, Ore. Write your mother.—Address MRS. VIOLA CAMERON, 1124½ East Galena St., Butte, Montana.

F. E. S. Received your letter. Send your address. Will join you. Have news.—Address WHIT, care *Adventure.*

CO. "I" 3d. BATT. ENGINEERS, all old "bunkies" of 1911,'12, '13, '14, while on survey work, on Island of Oahu, Hawaii. Please write me. Good opportunity for some of my friends and one inclined to taking chances. —Address EDWARD J. GUTTERIDGE, Gen. Del., Canyon, Texas.

FLORIDA boys who were out in the Everglades with Gollecheche and Shapley the Winter of 1914-15, write.—Address FRED ELLIS, 1806 Mt. Vernon St., Phila., Pa.

BRAUT, RAYMOND, last heard from in Mass., 1912. Formerly from Kentucky. Middle size, stocky, blue eyes, light hair. Write old pal who planned trip with you for Alaska.—Address E. L. MENTOR, Sterling, Penna.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

VAIL, DANIEL, last heard from at Cedar Springs, Kent Co., Mich. Does any one know of his whereabouts?—Address WM. B. BATTICE, Wrencoe, Idaho.

THE following have been inquired for in full in the June or July issues of *Adventure.* They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

ADAIR, WM. L.; Anderson, Carl O.; Avirette, John A.; Berridge, Charles Andrew; Bonner, Fred; Carson, J. G. (Jack) last heard from in Katalla 1906; Collins, Alfred (Electric); Conley, Mark Francis; Cook, E. D.; Coughlin, Dr. Jeremiah; Cowen, J. Gordon; Coy, Alexander, Robert and Mollie; Crawford, Geo. H., was in Searchlight, Nev., 1905-06; Dewitt, E. L.; Downing, Flora, F.; Ebert, Gertrude Viola, last heard of in Orphan Home; Fitzgerald, Garret; Floyd, Norris; Foster, Ben.; Gray, Curtis, last seen in Denver, Sept., 1915; Hammond, Warry; Hanser, Edward; Hart, Jack, left Myillenes, Chile, about, March 1911; Johnson, Ernest E.; Kirby, Ben (Society Ben); Kunze, Arthur, was in Greenwater, Calif.; Linn, Robert Hamilton; Loomis, Johnny; Lorraine, Frank, last heard of in U. S. Army; McArdle, James; McDonald, Jack; Mahoney, Dan.; Marine, Colonel Chas. A.; Miller, William Addison, last heard of in San Francisco, Nov., 1914; Moore, William; Morris, Frank (G. N. Lineman); Naugler, Owen V.; Ott, Charles; Owen, G. P.; Owens, Clyde; Piggott, Arthur W., last heard of in San Francisco; Poole, Charles W.; Prickett, Stone J. (rattlesnake Bill); Pritzart, Albert; Raven, Frank A.; Reilly, John A.; Schell, Fred B.; Schwerin, William H.; Spencer, Alma; Spiegelhalder, Tyler; Starlight, Captain; Stumpf, Julius; Summers, Thomas M.; Sweeny, Henry A., last heard of in France; Towne, George H., born in Monmouth, Maine, 1870; Trevor, Roland (Scotty); White, Hugh, in quest of gipsy kidnapers; Wiethalet, Fred; Wittenkamp, Ove.; Wood, Edward, last heard of in Boston, 1888; Yarbrough, Lawrence Seven (Bonnie).

MISCELLANEOUS: Comrades of Co. D, 17th Infantry in Mindanao, P. I.; Comrades Serving in Company I of the 40th U. S.; Old Comrades of the '70's that were in the Adobe Wall Pockett Cannon and Yellow House Fight; First or second mates on the barkantine *Emily Waters* on trips to South America and around the Horn, or to Australia and Barbadoes.

LAWRENCE STEWART, S. N. Morgan, Christian A. Damm, Mrs. Maude Thomas, George A. Blanchard, please send us your present addresses. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure.*

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 167, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 231, W 250, C 189, C 205, L. T. 207, L. T. 284, C 293, L. T. 302, W 311. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure.*

THE TRAIL AHEAD

The following stories are at present scheduled for the September issue of *Adventure*, out August 3d:

THE SECRET WOLF

S. Carleton

This complete novel is a thrilling mystery story of the Canadian North; action a-plenty; a plot that will make you burn late oil.

HEROES ALL

Arthur D. Howden Smith

Old *Captain McConaughy* leads his psalm-singing crew of tramp-steamer sailors straight at the Turkish Gallipoli defenses.

GUIDING CLEMENTINE

Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton

Clementine is a goat. And tenderfoot tourists take her into the northland that baby may have fresh milk. Then what *Clementine* decides to do makes this side-splitting yarn.

IN THE GRIP OF THE MINOTAUR

Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

In which *Ragnarr*, whom you've met in the number now in your hands, sails to Crete and defies the Master of the Mediterranean in his own stronghold.

THE UNMUDDING OF THE EMPIRE

Douglas S. Watson

Here's a writer who knows the oil country. This story of the derrick fields, where men of bone and brawn fight to drill fortunes from the earth, you'll not want to miss.

A BULL MOVEMENT IN YELLOW HORSE

W. C. Tuttle

The biggest, strangest, most contrary animal ever seen in the Northwest smashes into Yellow Horse settlement. A "44" can't phase him. What he does is beyond description. By a humorist known to you all.

THE TIDE-MATING

S. B. H. Hurst

A quiet, beautiful tale of a maid's love for her sailor sweetheart—a man of the life-boat crew—and of a great tragedy which swept down the coast on the wings of a gale.

TRAILING THE JUNGLE MAN

Geo. Warburton Lewis

A man-hunt in the little-known Panama back country.

THE MAN-BREAKER

Hapsburg Liebe

A determined man sets out to break the power that rules a Tennessee lumber-camp.

SNUFFY AND THE MONSTER

Gates Glen

How the nerve of a motorman was broken by "the monster," a great, steel-sided thing that struck fear into the hearts of street-railway men. Then what followed.

FIFTY-FIFTY

Leland Ward Peck

One to make you sit up and take notice. Of railroad builders.

THE MAN WHO BUILT UP FROM THE ACE

Henry Martel Gwynn

When the turning-point came in a lonely man's life, in a far Philippine village.

SHEP OF THE WANDERING FOOT

Paul H. Harris

Shep's worth meeting, knowing. Shake hands with him next month. He'll spin you a business yarn of a salesman in China.

ADVENTURE FOR SEPTEMBER

Magnitude

SIZE is not everything. But when a business is the largest of its kind and dominates its field throughout the world, there must be a big reason.

Butterick is the largest publisher of women's publications in the world. Butterick has the largest and most complete fashion organization in the world. Butterick does the largest pattern business in the world.

One hundred and twenty-five million copies of the Butterick periodicals are published every year. They are printed in five languages and are bought, paid for, and read in every civilized community on earth.

The sixteen-story Butterick Building, New York, includes one of the largest printing-plants in the world, and the largest battery of color-presses in the world.

The paper used by Butterick each year amounts to 3,922,000,000 square feet. If this were reeled out in a strip a foot wide, it would reach 742,740 miles; twenty-nine times around the earth, or three times from the earth to the moon.

Seventeen thousand merchants sell our publications and fashion service.

One issue of Butterick's three monthly American women's publications, The Delineator, The Designer, and The Woman's Magazine, is over one and one-half million copies.

This one issue piled flat, one copy on another, would make a stack 14,410 feet high—as high as Mount Rainier, or nineteen times as high as the Woolworth Building. Butterick receives from America alone more than three million letters every year—an average of ten thousand letters every working day—relating to these publications and the service which they represent.

This service of practical helpfulness for more than half a century has given the Butterick magazines their unique place in the confidence of American women.

Butterick

Monthly Magazines

The Delineator
The Designer
The Woman's Magazine

Quarterly Publications

Butterick Quarterly
Standard Quarterly
New Idea Quarterly

Before August 1st

OUR Special Summer Sales Plan will be open until August 1st to men of sales experience, integrity and ability. The plan is probably the most unique and profitable Summer sales plan ever announced. Two of America's best known and largest magazines at a special price—special commission—special territory. Our special representatives already started are earning $50.00 a week and upwards. 50 orders a week means $50.00. If you can measure up, have the time from now until August 31st, we will consider your application. Two business references must be furnished. Write frankly of your experience, where you prefer working, and how much money you wish to make. No appointments made after August 1st. Write to-day, using coupon below.

Men Wanted

August Desk
The Ridgway Company
Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

I have the time between now and August 31st, the experience, and I believe the ability to make good. Tell me more of what your plan is. Enclosed are two business references.

Name ....

Street and No. ....

City .... *State* ....